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ADVENTURE

DECEMBER 25¢



A SENSATIONAL NEW
INTERPLANETARY STORY

OUTLAWS OF CORPUS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEE FRANCIS
A SENSATIONAL NEW INTERPLANETARY STORY BY LEE FRANCIS

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SUSPENSE!



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Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which “whispers” to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as funda-

mental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the “Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis,” abbreviated by the initials “AMORC.” The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]

San Jose

California

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ADVENTURES

DECEMBER 1948

All Features Complete

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All Stories Complete

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith, illustrating
 a scene from "Outlaws of Corpus."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE big news this month is the new story by Lee Francis. You've already noticed the title on the cover, "Outlaws of Corpus," and you've probably smacked your lips at the swell painting Malcolm Smith did around the story. (Malcolm is famous for his space ship covers as you well know!) So get set for some mighty fancy reading when you start Lee's story on page 8. This is a beautiful change of pace story for Lee, proving that he can do a nice job on a variety of science-fiction themes. This present yarn is a story of other worlds, of desperate men fighting for their lives. The story concerns a group of condemned criminals who escape from a prison asteroid. You'll feel chills and thrills as they battle their way through space. We won't tell you what happens to them, but we will say that you won't put the magazine down until you've read the last word!

THE next story is another big treat. Big in two ways—for it was written by two of your top favorites, Chester S. Geier, and Richard S. Shaver. "Fountain of Change" is just what it implies. It seems that a scientist discovered one of the key forces of the Universe, a force that was so vital in itself it could almost be called alive. Properly controlled it could benefit mankind enormously, retarding age, curing sickness, and many other phases of change. But it fell into the hands of a mad group of people who believed they were not only descended from the ancient Greek Gods—but were the Gods themselves! We won't say

anything else here about the story, except that Chet and Dick have combined writing skills to give you a unique science-fantasy story that we feel sure you will long remember.

EVER popular Alexander Blade also returns this month. In "Brainstorm," Alex presents a truly "different" kind of science-fantasy story. This story will leave you with a question in your mind—for the story could have two endings—and each as logical as the other! The story concerns a man who was judged insane and committed to brain surgery to try and cure his insanity. The big question was, would the "innate" portion of his mind be stilled permanently and a serious crime be averted? Maybe you think you know the answer. Well, don't be too sure! So we'll leave you with that thought in mind. After you finish the story drop us a line and let us know what you think. . . .

EVERY man would like to find a Paradise on Earth. . . . That is the theme of H. R. Hickey's offering for this month. "A Place Like Eden" is the story of a scientist who perfected a machine that not only enabled him to look into another world—but reach into it as well! Of course, there were complications that faced the scientist—and the men who tried to steal his invention. But just what they were we won't tell you here—you'll find out when you read the story. We think you'll like the story, so we'll give Hickey a pat on the back for you in advance.



"This new mechanical pen will revolutionize the business!"

FINISHING up the issue this month is Berkeley Livingston, with a swell little short entitled, "Gimme Finds the Gimnick." This is the story of a bum who was firmly convinced that all magicians were fakes. To prove his point, this bum decided to accept a job (which in itself was a big effort for him) as a magician's assistant. He was going to prove that there was no such thing as "magic." That's as far as we'll go here. But you'll get a big kick out of the ending to the story or we miss our guess!

NEXT month we'll present a great new Geier novel, "The Return of Sihnd." It's an epic tale of Arabian Nights adventure, filled with the kind of fantasy that Chet handles so well. So we'll be seeing you then. . . . W.L.H.

TRIAL BY TORTURE

By HILARY COWEN

The story of unbelievable tortures inflicted upon helpless victims at tribal ceremonies

THE religious rites of primitive peoples almost always take the form of cruel and unusual practices. Rarely are their gods benevolent and kind—they reward their followers but seldom—they punish however quickly and cruelly. This is probably a consequence of the early priests who felt that fear was the best and most powerful instrument at their hands.

The rites of the ancient Aztecs and the Mayas are familiar to everyone. We can rarely find anything to compare with their habit of sacrificing people on such a grand scale and so frequently and so cruelly. The innocent victims chosen for the sacrifice were led up the steps of the huge, pyramidal stone altars, where their chests were split open and the still-beating hearts dragged from their living bodies which were then cast into the flames.

As horrible as that seems to us, in its way it is amateurish compared with the habits of other and more modern groups. African explorers in the nineteenth century often discovered practices which made those of the Aztecs seem mild. Captain Armand Caraud, of a Belgian exploratory group in the Belgian Congo, tells of the religious habits of an obscure tribe of natives known as the N'goss. Every three months they would hold a religious celebration and festival that took the form of a drunken orgy to begin with. They drank a powerful home-constructed beverage made from a fermented bark. After a day of feasting and a night of wild sexual orgies, a young man and a young woman were selected from the tribe's young men and women, by a secret process known only to the witch doctor. Caraud judged from his observations that this was simply the choice of the witch doctor, for he noticed that all the young people seemed to curry his favor.

In any event, the young couple were forcibly mated before the eyes of the tribe. Then they were tied to separate wooden stakes placed before a huge carved wooden statue of a roughly-human head. While the rest of the tribe chanted a dirge-like song, two sub-witch doctors beat the helpless victims with rhinoceros-hide whips until they were practically a bloody pulp. Caraud pointed out that the beating was so severe as to be almost unbelievable. The victims were beaten until barely alive. Then ensued a period of rest for the victims during which they were resuscitated to awareness as nearly as was possible.

Then with the aid of a hammer or mallet, the witch doctors went to work again on their victims.

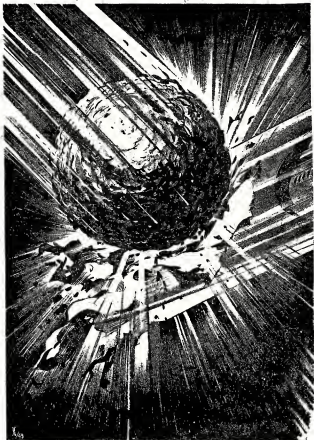


They drove stakes of wood about twenty centimeters long and one centimeter in diameter through various portions of their victims' anatomy starting with the arms. Caraud personally witnessed this hideous rite, but being alone he did not dare interfere with the ceremony. The natives regarded him as a lesser sort of god and, while they went out of their way to placate and satisfy him, he knew that any interference on his part would probably result in his being treated in a similar fashion. Finally the victims died, and their bodies were cut up and distributed among the natives as delicate titbits.

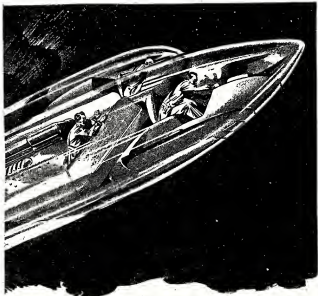
Part of the effort of the Belgian government to stamp out these wiled practices was the direct result of Caraud's report on them. Nevertheless, it is known that even today, despite the utmost vigilance of the authorities, there are things done among inland tribes that are spoken of merely in hushed whispers by the natives who know of them. Fortunately these things are not wide-spread. Before we too rapidly and lavishly condemn the primitives for what they have done in the past, all we need do is look to some of the things that the Nazis practiced in their concentration camps. At least the natives could claim ignorance of modern ethics and morality.

Occasionally, cruel and unusual rites are discovered to exist even in our big cities among certain depraved types of people. Fortunately, nearly always these things are connected with drug addicts and are stamped out with celerity by alert police forces.

* * *



There was a terrible creaking sound as the meteor smashed into the helpless Vesarus . . .



OUTLAWS OF CORPUS

By **LEE FRANCIS**

It was a difficult decision to make: Stay on the doomed prison world and die—or go with twelve desperate killers on a mad flight through space

TWELVE murderers were working over the outmoded, broken motors of the ship, Vesarus. Twelve men confined on the satellite Corpus, and left there to die.

Risk Lawton wiped the grease from his cheek and stepped back, his mouth grim. In twenty-eight hours the satellite would be doomed. In those twenty-eight hours, he, Risk Lawton, was responsible for the lives of twelve killers.

The whole thing was a bitter pill to swallow.

He saw Braskett, huge, raw-boned, coming toward him from the prow of the Vesarus. Braskett looked hewildered and fighting mad, but that was no new expression for Meteor Braskett. The man had killed five times, and tried to kill again. The last time, he had thrown a wrench at Risk Lawton, and Lawton, tough as a penal colony guard has to be, had laughed the thing off and chided Braskett for having a poor aim.

Braskett halted at the designated ten paces, saluted sloppily and let his arm fall limply at his side.

"Look, here, Lawton . . ."

"Mr. Lawton," Lawton reminded him.

Braskett grinned sourly.

"Mr. Lawton," he accented the Mr. "How in the name of the Court of Vista are we gonna do it?"

Lawton knew what he meant. Knew what he was referring to when he spoke of Vista. He frowned. The Court of Vista had sent him here five years ago. Entrusted him with twelve killers and enough supplies for the period of confinement. He remembered Commander Burton's last words as the Commander hoarded his ship back to Venus.

"You're a good man, Lawton," Burton had said, "but you're young. Serve your guard time out here. We'll pick you up on August fifth. The satellite

will break up by August thirtieth, according to astronomic measurements. That will give you time for evacuation. When this gang of prisoners is transferred, I'll assign a new man to them. Meanwhile, do a good job, boy. Make the Commanding Group proud of you."

Risk Lawton stood there, staring at Braskett, his head down against the wind, unconscious of the dust and filth that blew around him. He was thinking of that day, a long five years back, when Commander Burton had released his hand and gone aboard the prison ship. How he had watched the ship become a speck in the distance, and then turned to face five long years of isolation.

They were tough. Men like Braskett thought nothing of heaving wrenches at his head.

Braskett shifted from one foot to the other.

"Me, I'm the representative of the men. You've been a pretty nice guy to me and to the others. The men are plenty worried. That ship the Vesarus hasn't been in condition to fly for a long time. We ain't getting nowhere with the motors."

No condition to fly.

Lawton knew it. He had known since last month. He had waited for the first of August, and the sight of the prison ship coming in a wide arc, to sit down near the lonely prison. The ship hadn't come. August twenty-eighth, he thought, and not there. Somehow, after the middle of the month he had given up hope. Had tackled the hopeless job of getting the men off Corpus in the outmoded, hattle-scarred Vesarus. It hadn't flown since the Martian war. He counted mentally, that would be forty years.

"I know exactly what we're up against, Prisoner Braskett," he said sharply. "You'll have to keep trying. I'm in the same boat with you."

HE WAS getting edgy and tired of the whole show. He had always treated his men decently. Braskett should realize . . .

- Braskett did realize. He was enjoying the situation to an extent.

"Now you ain't any better than we are, are you Mr. Lawton? For all your fine chances at the Honor Flight, they forgot all about you. They left you out here to die with us."

Lawton moved forward two paces. Braskett dodged, but he was too late. Risk Lawton's fist connected with the murderer's jaw and sent him down in the dust.

"Get up," Lawton said. "This satellite is slated for complete destruction in two days. *Do you understand that?* Go back and tell your men that I might have tried to escape alone, left you all here to the fate you deserved. Instead, I've been working side by side with you, fighting to free you. If you don't like it the way it is, I'll pound any man here to a pulp before I'll let him tell me I'm not doing the best job I can."

Braskett got to his feet slowly. Lawton could fathom the thought behind that sullen face. He knew that Braskett would never change. That free, or in confinement, Braskett would always be a murderer.

He turned his back on the big man and plodded wearily back to the office. Pretending to study the papers on his desk, he kept an eye on the ship. Braskett went back to the stodgy-looking, unworthy craft and mounted the ladder to the hold. He could see the men following, one by one, to gather inside. He knew they were plotting again.

"Kill Lawton. He's not one of us."

Lawton could almost hear the conversation. He looked at the papers he had pretended to study. Copies of

the High Court's disposal of prisoners. Five years old. Turning black from dust and moisture.

He cleared the desk with his arms, sweeping the mass onto the floor. He stood up and started to pace the floor.

Five years ago he had been ready to enter the service with his brother, Brent. Now Brent had all the gravy, no doubt. He, Risk, was stuck on a penal satellite, doomed to sudden death within two or three days at the most.

He entered the observatory, hoping against hope that the scope-glass might reveal the prison ship, days late, riding through space toward Corpus. He studied the glass for a good five minutes. After that the dust became so thick that he could see nothing.

He knew what that dust meant. He had seen satellites vanish before. The storm came from the Varus region of Venus, whipped to a frenzy until the force of it tore through space, crashing satellites and leaving their bits grinding through the atmosphere, hitting the surface of the planet like small, jagged stones.

Lawton left the observatory and faced the blinding light of the office. He stopped short, staring with unbelieving eyes at the Vesarus. Through the window, he could see the ship and the men who worked around it. Something had changed. For a moment he didn't know what. Then it dawned on him that the Vesarus had changed its position. He went outside hurriedly. He was sure he couldn't be wrong. The Vesarus had been sitting like a duck on the same spot for years. Now he was sure that it had moved forward at least six feet.

The men remained at their work as he approached.

HE FOUND Braskett working on a vent-pipe near the stern. The

man whirled and saluted smartly. There was something different in Braskett's attitude. He smiled almost pleasantly.

"Anything I can do for you, Sir?"

Lawton tried to disguise the triumph he felt inside.

"Did you manage to start the ship?"

There was a warning in Braskett's frown. Something that put Lawton on guard.

"You're mistaken, Sir," Braskett said. "The Vesarus is as dead as she ever was."

Lawton wanted to tell him that he lied. That the Vesarus had changed position. He knew that Braskett was hiding the truth.

"Odd," he said. "I was in the observatory. Thought I heard the motors turn over."

Braskett smiled. His eyes were narrowed and cunning.

"Hearing things again, Sir," he said. "I can understand how you feel. You had a right to hit me. I had it coming."

Lawton nodded.

"That's the way to take it," he said. "I try to be fair with all of you. Guess I was mistaken about the motors."

He returned to the office and sat down. He pondered over the sudden change in Braskett's attitude.

The dust was shifting rapidly and change of the ship's position would not be evident in the soil. Yet, he was positive that the ship had been started long enough to change positions.

Braskett was planning something, and Lawton wasn't included in the plan. He would have to devise a plan at once. Would have to be ready.

He went outside, glancing quickly at the men near the ship. They acted differently than they had this morning. The desperation was gone from their faces. They weren't actually working at anything. They seemed to be tinkering

at portions of the ship that needed no attention. They smiled and talked among themselves.

Lawton walked away from the ship, down the hill toward the ugly, squat prison building. Tonight he would stay close to the Vesarus. He would double lock the cells.

He was sure that the Vesarus would leave Corpus soon. He prayed silently that it would be soon enough to miss the full force of the storm, and that he would be on board when the Vesarus plowed heavily into the void.

IT WAS a simple scheme. Simple, and for that very reason, almost clever enough to fool Risk Lawton. The cell block in which his charges were locked, opened directly to the radium-moat, standard protector of Venusian prison enclosures. The bridge across the moat had been carefully lined on the underside with lead. With the bridge up, no prisoner could escape without swimming in a pond of liquid radium. Thus far no escapes had ever been made in any of the Venusian prison camps.

Lawton didn't dare take any chances. He knew that if he was correct—if the Vesarus was ready to fly, he would have to board it tonight. Yet, he had no idea what the prisoners had done to repair the ship. He had to depend on them to get the Vesarus into space.

He was sure that no one could leave the prison without facing death in the radium moat. He dared not sleep, however, for though escape appeared impossible, he was sure that something was afoot.

Lawton spent some time after the building was locked up, wandering around the Vesarus. The storm was approaching a thirty-mile wind, and by morning, if he was any judge, a man wouldn't be able to venture outside.

The radion-masts had been carried away. He had no contact with the outside. He had had none for the past two years. Power equipment had failed at that time, and life since had been confined to three meals a day with the prisoners, and lonely hours spent dreaming of the palaces of Vista.

Lawton left the ship and walked slowly toward the prison. It was his custom to take a last look around just before midnight. He reached the moat, being careful to stay behind the barrier that protected the outer edge. Halfway around the small circle that enclosed the prison, he thought he saw something glistening against the surface of the pool. He halted in the shadows, watching. A long line had been attached to each side of the moat, and a strange figure encased in what looked like a suit of armor, was coming across hand over hand, body dragging in the radium bath.

It was so simple that Lawton shuddered, happy that they hadn't tried it before—hadn't got away before he was wise to their scheme. He waited, watching the prisoner reach the escape side of the moat, climb out of the suit behind the safety barrier and let it slip easily back into the moat. It was drawn back rapidly and disappeared into one of the windows close to the bottom of the cell block.

Lawton remembered the old battle suit he had worn during the radium mine wars back on Venus. Those had been tough days, and it was in the mines that he first distinguished himself in battle. He had cherished and kept that suit. There wasn't room in the office or in his quarters for the cumbersome thing. He had left it in the storeroom below the prison building. They had found it there, probably weeks ago, and made plans to use it tonight.

Lawton had never suspected that he might want them to escape. His safety depended on their successful escape from Corpus. They evidently knew how to get the ship away safely. He had no knowledge of what had to be done.

Lawton waited quietly for the eleventh figure to cross. As the suit was dragged back for the last man, he left the wall stealthily and stayed in the shadows of the prison until he reached the far side. Out of their sight, he started to run. He reached the Vesarus and slipped quickly into the side hatch. He knew the old transport well. He had flown her years ago.

WHERE would he hide? He had to choose a place where he could lock himself in—get hold of the controls, and hold them all at bay when the time for action came.

The control panel in the navigation room. That would be it.

He climbed the rickety ladders quickly, feeling his way in the darkness toward the navigation chamber. He found it, opened the creaky door and went inside. Through the panel-glass he could see the ground far below the chamber. Meteor Braskett's men were coming stealthily in threes and fours. He grinned. This time, the joke was on Braskett.

The instrument panel was a ponderous, old-fashioned affair. When Lawton was a kid of fourteen, he had hidden behind it once, and scared the blazes out of his instructor by shouting at him as the ship was about to take off. He wondered if he could still squeeze into the small opening behind the panel. The board was touched with rust, and the instruments rattled against it. He found the release button in the underside, and released the panel door. He stared into the dusty

space behind it. He kneeled, and forced his way back into the dark-hole. Safely squeezed into place, he reached out and closed the panel. It was pitch dark, but he could see part of the room through cracks around the instruments. The air was quite fresh.

Footsteps pounded up the ladder and Meteor Braskett entered the navigation room. Lawton could see only enough of him to identify the man. Two other prisoners came in. Lawton guessed they were Flagon of Mars, and Whippley, the earth man who had knifed a Venusian high official.

Braskett crossed the room and grasped the power release lever.

"Yo! Hoskins," he called. "How about that power plant. About ready?"

Lawton heard Leo Hoskins, the mechanic, shout from the engine room of the Vesarus.

"Keep your nose clean up there. We're getting her ready."

The lights in the navigation room snapped on suddenly.

"We got to get her out of here fast, now," Braskett said. "Lawton will open up with the ray-canon if he wakes up and sees the ship lighted."

Lawton chuckled silently. He could reach out and touch Braskett's legs from where he sat, crouched behind the panel. Braskett's companions seemed to know their places. This, he realized, had been planned for a long time.

"Hoskins to Braskett."

The radio phone was alive now. Hoskins' voice filled the room, hollow and loud. "Braskett, the motors are hitting smoothly. Get us out of here. That damned Lawton might be up to something . . ."

WHAM

BRASKETT had answered by dragging down the heavy control bar

with both hands. Hoskins' voice died abruptly and the force of the take-off threw Risk Lawton violently against the inner side of the panel. Fortunately the sound of his falling body was drowned by the roar of tail-fire that shot from the rusty pipes of the Vesarus. He heard Hoskins swearing loudly, then Meteor Braskett's laugh filled the room. It was a loud, booming laugh, defiant and filled with bravado.

"Good-by, Lawton," he shouted. "Good-by to the beloved satellite of Corpus. By golly, Whippley, we could have made this get-away four years ago if Lawton had given us a few days to work on the ship. He didn't know I stole the radiump power-ring that first morning. Five days to train a crew and get things lined up. Lawton was okay as a pilot, but he doesn't know that I worked as engineer on the proud ship Vesarus when it was taking tourist trips to Earth fifty years ago."

Lawton could hear Whippley's chuckle. Then Hoskins called over the speaker again.

"Damn you, Braskett, why didn't you tell me we were taking off. Almost broke my neck."

"Keep your mouth shut and stay in your own department," Braskett shouted back. From the movement of control wires about him, Lawton knew that Braskett was doing a good job with the ship.

No more sounds came from beyond the instrument panel. He could imagine that all was not well outside. That the crew was divided in its feelings toward Braskett. Hoskins, for one, could hardly be friendly with the big man.

For ten minutes, Lawton guessed, only the sound of footsteps came to him. Then he heard Braskett swear bitterly. At the same time, the steering rudder bar jerked around, forcing Lawton to

curl up even more snugly to stay out of its way.

"Might have known it," Braskett said. "We got off on a good start, and now the trouble's starting."

"I saw that one," Whippley's voice indicated fright. "Braskett, you did okay. How long can we keep on dodging them?"

Dodging them?

That meant that the storm was closing in. That the meteor barrage had already hit Corpus. That the satellite was going to pieces. He calculated mentally. The Vesarus was loggy and slow with age. It would be at least forty minutes more before they would be out into the safe area of the void. In those forty minutes, if Corpus had broken up, Meteor Braskett would have his hands full.

"Hold her hard, Braskett," Whippley was no mean navigator himself. He had worked on the ore ships, out of the Yanna Province. "That's a heavy one coming. Full speed."

Braskett swore again, softly, and pulled the bar around.

"Say your prayers, Braskett." It was Flagon speaking. Flagon who escaped the Blue Star Patrol of Mars for over twenty years. "You need plenty of guts to face it."

A BIG meteor chunk, Lawton decided. He knew that Braskett's lips were white, his hands frozen to the controls. Unconsciously, Lawton tensed for the collision.

He had faced these meteor storms himself many times. There are sometimes five-minute intervals when the huge metal monsters rush straight at a ship. You have to hold the ship dead in line with the meteor. If you rushed to one side, it got caught in your slip stream, and followed you, ending up on your back. If you went straight at it,

the meteor would in nine cases out of ten, change its course slightly and plunge by. . . .

W-H-I-S-S-S-

A low, ugly sound. Lawton sighed. They were safe this time. The Vesarus was untouched. He heard Whippley sigh. Braskett shifted his feet slightly.

"That takes guts," he said.

Flagon chuckled.

"Patting yourself on the back, huh, Braskett?"

"Shadup and leave the boss alone," Whippley snapped. "He's the only guy on board who can run this damned thing. Mind your own business."

Lawton heard the scuffle that followed. He heard the dull thud of flesh against bone and saw Whippley measure his length on the cabin floor. The safety catch on the control board snapped into place. Lawton knew the Vesarus was flying itself. That Braskett, huge and bull-like was lumbering across the room.

"Take it easy, Braskett."

Flagon's voice, full of fright.

"Sure," Braskett said. "Sure, take it easy, Braskett. You're a louse, Braskett, and I'd knife you if I had a chance. But take it easy. . . ."

The words stopped abruptly with a grunt. Braskett put everything he had into the blow. Flagon went down hard, and his head cracked on the navigation table. Lawton could see his face, pale and contorted with pain, his neck twisted at a crazy angle. Blood started to run from his lips and formed a pool on the floor. Flagon's eyes were wide open. Whippley got up slowly.

"Thanks," he said. "I—I guess he had it coming."

Braskett switched on the radio-telephone.

"Listen, you guys," he said. "You might as well get this straight. Flagon

didn't like me. He got smart. Flagon ain't with us any more. I'm the only man on board that can pilot this tin can full of rats. From now on, I'm the boss, and you can come up here one by one or all at once, if there's any argument."

Silence for ten seconds, then:

"YOU said Flagon isn't with us. What you getting at, Braskett?"

It was Hoskins in the engine room, his voice sly, reproachful.

"Send a man up here to toss him out the escape hatch," Braskett answered coolly. "He'll tell you what happened to Flagon. If you get smart . . ."

Hoskins chuckled.

"Meteor Braskett rides again," he said sarcastically. "Listen, big fellow, you may be able to bulldoze some of these swamp rats. Me, I'm also a pretty important part of the crew. What do you know about engines?"

Lawton heard Braskett mumbling angrily under his breath. Finally he said: "Okay, Hoskins, you stay where you belong and I'll stay here. Just keep your crew busy and your mouth shut. We'll get along."

Hoskins didn't answer. Whippley said in a low voice:

"I'm on your side, Braskett. Flagon didn't have any right to—"

"Keep your yap shut," Braskett snapped. "I'll take care of myself."

"Okay—okay, so stick by yourself. Me, I'm just trying to be a pal, that's all."

The Vesarus had a bad crew, Lawton thought. A crew that might help him when it came time for him to escape. He hoped that they would go on fighting among themselves.

"We ain't out of the woods yet. We got twenty minutes ahead when anything can happen."

"Talking about what might happen," Braskett said, "I wonder what the devil

that dark . . ."

"Turn her—turn her wide," Whippley was screaming suddenly at the top of his voice. Lawton stiffened in the tiny compartment, felt the rudder bar whip around and catch him smartly on the side. Braskett was cursing loudly, jerking at the bar.

"Turn her harder," Whippley was frightened out of all reason. His high-pitched voice signalled a fear that no man could escape the effect of. "We ain't gonna make it."

Braskett was putting his full weight against the bar. Lawton couldn't move. He hadn't expected the sudden change of course and the bar had caught him, wedging him against the wall, preventing the bar from going where it should.

"The damned thing's caught."

For the first time, anger gave way to panic in Braskett's voice. "I can't . . ."

CRASH.

Lawton knew little of what followed. His subconscious mind told him that the course of the meteor shower had changed. That both Braskett and Whippley were caught off guard.

The Vesarus seemed to halt abruptly, and the screaming, crushing blow of the meteor sent it spinning backward, hurtling end over end in space. Lawton was caught between the wall of the compartment and the wedged steering bar. His legs were thrown violently against metal and merciful darkness hid further details from his numbed brain.

RISK LAWTON recovered slowly. At first he was conscious only of the tightness against his ribs. Then, gradually, the twisted control wires and bars were visible in the fog that surrounded him. A sigh escaped his lips. At least he was still alive. Light filtered through the cracks on the control board. He heard someone moaning.

"My chest— Oh God, my chest."

It was Whippley.

Lawton tried to inventory his pains. He was sure now that the Vesarus was completely out of control. The lights were still on, but no hum of power came from below. Braskett's feet were visible, pointing upward from the floor. Both men must be hurt badly. Whippley couldn't move.

With every last ounce of energy he could muster, Lawton fought with the wire that had wrapped around him. At last he was free. He opened the battered panel, slipped out feet first and lay panting on the floor beside Braskett. Braskett hadn't moved but his eyes were open, blinking at the ceiling. Lawton's legs felt as though they would never work again. He flexed his knees slowly and managed, by holding tightly to the navigation table, to lift himself to his feet. Whippley was still moaning.

Lawton staggered toward him, then turned away, sick. Whippley had one leg of a navigation table buried in his back. It came through, sticking out of his chest. How the man remained alive was a mystery. Lawton made his way to the Mercy Chest and took out a mask. He placed it gently on Whippley's face and broke the gas container. Whippley stopped moaning and relief showed plainly on his face. He opened his eyes and they were full of gratitude. They remained open and life gradually went from them. Whippley died without pain.

Risk Lawton had to act fast. He was stronger now. His mind worked clearly. Braskett still showed no sign of regaining consciousness. Lawton closed and bolted the door. It was broken near the bottom, but strong enough to hold. He went to his knees beside Braskett. Braskett's lips opened and he tried to whisper.

"Hello—Lawton. So you got yourself in this mess with the rest of us."

Lawton didn't answer. He went over Braskett with his hands, feeling for broken bones. Braskett seemed sound enough.

"What's the matter with you?"

Braskett continued to smile. He didn't want to admit he was licked.

"Paralyzed," he said. "Can't move a muscle."

LAWTON frowned. This was the first space-paralysis case he'd ever seen. He had heard that men sometimes lost control of their muscles after a bad collision. The shock deadened the muscles for a short or extended period of time.

Hoskins' voice came over the receiver.

"What happened up there? You okay, Braskett?"

Lawton didn't get up. He shouted:

"Hello, Hoskins. Any more of the crew alive?"

He started to pick Braskett up. Braskett was heavy. Lawton got him to the table that was still upright and laid him down. He smiled a little at the dead silence below. Then Hoskins asked in an unbelieving voice:

"That you, Lawton?"

Lawton went to the phone.

"Listen carefully, Hoskins. I came aboard last night. Fortunately for you that I did. Braskett is helpless. The collision gave him a bad case of space paralysis. If this thing will still fly, I'll get you in safely. The door to the navigation room is locked. If any of the men try to come up, I'll shoot them down before they get me. If you start trouble, I'll let you all sit out here in space until Venus cracks wide open."

Hoskins was thinking it all out carefully. Finally he said:

"That would be an awful long time,

Lawton. I guess we'll play ball with you. What's the deal?"

"Work on your motors," Lawton said. "The main rudder is still okay. I can blunder in pretty close to Vista. When we get there, you all get turned back to the proper authorities. Is that clear?"

He could hear Hoskins' voice, low and urgent, explaining the situation to the others. Then:

"We'd rather sit in another prison than float around up here. Get some sleep, Lawton. I think I can get a couple of the tubes firing again in a few hours."

Lawton chuckled. It was a cold, emotionless sound.

"Go to work then," he said. "But remember, I'm not going to get any of that sleep you suggest. I'll be wide awake and watching the door until you give me the go-ahead signal."

NEVER did a more dilapidated ship crash land at the Vista space port, than the day the Vesarus staggered into the capital city of Venus. The port was closed to private traffic, for the magnificent Narsus, Flag Ship of the Venusian Space Fleet, was due from Mars. Commander Lann Shurley, leader of the Venusian fleet, was on board, and a more tight-lipped, hard faced man, the Venusian flyers had never worked for.

The Vesarus hobbled in and dug a deep crater in the center of the port. Before five seconds had elapsed, several crash cars had winged their way silently from the hangars and were speeding toward the Vesarus where she lay on her rusty back. Fifteen minutes later, Risk Lawton and the remainder of his crew were locked up in the port's concentration house, ready to tell their story to the Commander in person.

Risk Lawton was sick of it all, in-

cluding the bouncing around he had received from port officials. He didn't care whether the Commander freed them or hurned them all down at the firing wall. He sat on the stone bench, in the concentration office, watching the sleek red Narsus come in for a perfect landing.

Commander Lanns Shurley was tough, no doubt of that. A tall, middle-aged man, he carried his gold lace and medals with all the grace of a person who lived with glory. His gray eyes were cold as ice when he at last took time out to interview the members of the wrecked ship's crew. He had the details of the landing and knew that he would have faced disaster, had the Narsus landed head on with the Vesarus, a few minutes earlier.

He came into the concentration building quickly, sighed and removed his flying helmet.

Honor guards formed a breastwork against the crowds outside the building.

Puzzled at the strange faces in the room, Risk Lawton stood up and saluted as smartly as he could. He was aware of the torn dusty uniform that he wore. The Commander, a stranger to him, had evidently come to power during Lawton's stay on Corpus.

"Well," Lanns Shurley asked abruptly. "What explanation can you give?"

Several officials grouped closely around the Commander. Lawton felt his cheeks growing warm, and his fists clenched at his side.

"I was piloting a wrecked spacer," he said slowly. "It was my impression that a ship in distress had priority at any port."

One of the officers snorted, then tried to cover up his mirth. Commander Lanns Shurley remained grim.

"You're a little behind the times, are you not? From what group do you come?"

Lawton saluted again.

"Sixth Flight—Yannin Province," he said, mentioning his old outfit.

Lanns Shurley's face turned red.

"You come from an outfit that died with the old regime," he said. "It was broken up and reorganized. *You could not be a member.*"

He pivoted smartly and beckoned the guard of the concentration building. The man came forward.

"Yes, Sir?"

"Have you examined this man's credentials?"

The guard looked nervous.

"I haven't as yet," he admitted. "Everything happened so quickly. We were all worried about your safety, Sir."

The Commander ignored the compliment.

"Do so at once," he snapped.

LAWTON, knowing what was coming, reached into the pocket of his tunic. His hand stopped, then fumbled about, and came out empty. A puzzled frown touched his forehead. The guard was waiting to see his papers.

"Well?"

"I—I guess I've lost them," Lawton said slowly. "The Vesarus was wrecked in a meteor storm. My clothes were torn badly."

"Suppose," Commander Lanns Shurley suggested in gentle sarcasm, "you tell us all about the good ship Vesarus. I saw the ship turned over beside the field. I'm curious."

Lawton talked for ten minutes, telling Shurley about his stay on Corpus, how he had expected rescue before the satellite went to pieces. About the Vesarus and its wild flight.

"And that's all I can tell you," he ended. "I knew nothing about the changes in personnel. If Commander Witt Burton was here, I'm sure he would vouch for my honesty."

At the mention of Burton's name, every officer in the room turned to stare at Commander Shurley. The Commander, who had acted fairly interested until now, swore suddenly under his breath.

"Burton?"

Lawton nodded.

"Commander Burton placed me on Corpus five years ago," he said. "If you'll take me to him."

The Commander frowned.

"You're rather useless to us, Lawton, if that's your name. Let me give you a short review of what has happened here since you were stranded on," he smiled, "what was it, Corpus?"

He didn't wait for a reply, but gave a quick explanation.

"Three years ago, Burton was charged with a plot to turn Vista over to the Raiders of Mars. Burton and his entire staff were purged. All state records burned mysteriously one night. Actually, there was no mystery about the fire. The people worshipped Burton and we didn't dare destroy that illusion. I was chosen by the fleet to take Burton's place. We were forced to destroy every person, every paper that touched even remotely on Burton's past. The people thought Burton died in battle. That is the way heroes should die."

He paused, wiping his forehead with his hand.

"If you tell the truth, I see no reason why you cannot rejoin the force."

Lawton, overcome as he was with the news of Commander Burton, had reason to believe in Shurley's honesty. The man didn't look capable of being a liar or a crook.

"I can prove my honesty, Sir," he said. "I fought and will fight for Venus and her people. I knew nothing of the plot with the Raiders of Mars. I came back, hoping to fight

again—"

"Enough," Shurley said abruptly. "I haven't the time to stay here indefinitely. We will watch you closely. If you attempt to betray us," he snapped his fingers loudly, "pffft."

"Meanwhile," he continued, "tell me who we can find who will identify you as Lawton of the old Flight?"

"The only man I know, outside of those who died," Lawton said, "is my brother . . ."

"Not so fast, Braskett . . ."

THE voice came from the back of the room, from among the prisoner crew of the *Vesarus*. Lawton recognized Braskett's voice. Braskett, who was lying on a cot, supposedly unable to speak above a whisper. The officials turned and the group drew apart, so that Lawton could see Braskett from where he stood. Hoskins was there, and the others, staring at him hostilely. Hoskins had a dirty grin pasted on his thin face.

"What's this?" Commander Shurley snapped. "Who are you? Why do you call this man Braskett?"

To Lawton's complete amazement, Braskett got to his feet slowly. He had perfect control over every muscle.

"That's Meteor Braskett, all right," he said, pointing out Lawton. "I've been wondering how long he'd try to keep up the farce. He must have known I wouldn't let him go through with it."

Lawton stood rooted to the floor. He didn't dare attempt to reach Braskett now. They'd take him prisoner before he could go three paces.

This was the time to think and talk quickly.

"You can't do it, Braskett," he said coldly. "You haven't the guts to lie out of it."

Braskett chuckled. He looked huge,

standing on his feet for the first time in days.

"Look here, Commander," he said. "That man says his name is Lawton. I don't blame him for trying to work his way out. Meteor Braskett has killed a good many men in his day. He doesn't want to pay for those deaths. If he's Lawton, where are his papers? Pilots don't go around losing their identification papers. They are too precious to take any chances with."

Commander Shurley was staring at him fixedly. He didn't know what to believe. Lawton—or Braskett—or someone, had almost convinced him of his innocence. That made Shurley angry.

"Go on," he said icily. "I suppose you can prove that you are the real Lawton?"

Braskett unbuttoned the pocket of his tunic and drew out a carefully folded paper. He passed it to the guard who in turn relayed it to Shurley.

"There you are, sir," he said politely. "Ricky Lawton, member of the Flight under Commander Burton, may the gods blast his villainous hide."

The speech impressed Shurley. He took the paper and read it carefully, staring over it in turn at Braskett, then at Lawton. Lawton stood his ground. Now he had nothing to support his claim. Braskett had been smart to say what he did about Burton. Such a remark hadn't occurred to Lawton. Risk had always been trained to have respect for his superiors, even though they died as traitors.

"THAT'S enough," Shurley was saying in a clipped, angry voice. "It's true that Flight men do not lose their passes or identification papers."

He turned to Braskett. "Report to Flight Seven of the Vista Guards. Give them your full story and turn these

papers over to Lieutenant Gray. I'll send him a note explaining the situation. We'll forgive you the landing as you knew nothing of what had transpired here in your absence."

Braskett saluted sloppily and followed a guard from the room.

"As for you," Shurley snapped at Lawton, "no punishment could be too great. I half suspect that you were one of Burton's cronies before they railroaded you to Corpus, or whatever that bell spot was named. You're going into prison and you're going to sweat it out. I'll teach you men that I take nothing but the truth from any of you. Guard, take this man out and see that he gets the deepest cell under Vista. Have him report to me in just six days. I'll give a final decision at that time."

Lawton was silent. Within him raged a torrent of anger and hate toward so unfair a Commander. As he turned away, however, he had reason to wonder what kind of a man this Lanns Shurley really was.

It wasn't his imagination, he was sure of that. Shurley was close to him as he saluted, and he could not have mistaken the fleeting smile and the deliberate wink that Shurley had meant for him and him alone.

Vista had not changed in five years. Burton and his regime might have gone. Vista, with the exception of a new spire here and there, was the same. Within the prison car, Risk Lawton studied the north and south cities as the car bore him swiftly toward the prison.

HE WAS still puzzled by that deliberate wink Shurley had given him, but decided it might have been a trick of the eye, perhaps a nervous trait of the new Commander. The prison car, black to indicate priority over all other highway traffic, whirled swiftly up Launa Hill. Lawton, his

eyes eagerly drinking in details he had almost forgotten, was suddenly very lonely.

Risk Lawton was an outcast. If he had come home in honor, it would have been the same. His only living relative, Brent Lawton, was far away in Yannan province. Vista, filled with gay officials and their wives and daughters, knew nothing of Lawton and what he had been through on Corpus during those hellish five years. In addition to that, he was now on his way to the underground prison, without freedom to experience the pleasures that Vista afforded her citizens.

The car entered Ronda Drive and sped onward. Ronda Drive was bordered by the finest Vista had to offer. Slim, tower buildings, built from clear Crystalia, cut in flawless designs. They flashed light and color along the entire cool sweep of the Venusian Sea. To his left, blue water flashed and sparkled on white sand. Here was the Gold Coast of Vista, rich beyond desire, calm and peaceful.

Risk swore softly. Whom could he blame? Shurley had been right.

If Commander Burton had been planning to betray Venus, it was right that all trace of him be destroyed. Lawton didn't mistrust Shurley's honesty of purpose. The new Commander had appeared upright and honest.

He, Risk Lawton, was but a very tiny speck on the horizon of Venus. No home, no friends, and no proof of his own identity.

The car left Ronda Drive and was slipping in and out of traffic down Mudd Hill, into the prison slum area. In five minutes he would be in the toms. There, locked deep under the city, seen only by the jailers, he would have no chance to escape.

There was little opportunity for him to make a getaway, and once he was

free, where could he go? He had no transportation to Yannan. The last he had heard of his brother, Brent was working in the Bitzert Mountains, managing an iradius mine and making a fortune for himself. The Bitzert Mountains were fifteen hundred miles away.

The car halted before a morose, squat stone building. It had no windows. It was very small, hardly more than a surface entrance for the vast prison system below the ground.

The door behind Lawton clicked open. He faced a guard with levelled air-gun, and remembered how the damned things could blast a man into nothingness with the simple twist of the trigger-lobes.

"OUT," the guard said. He was smiling, but there was something sadistic about that smile. Traitors weren't popular in Vista.

Lawton stepped wearily out of the car. As his feet touched the street, hell broke loose in the next block.

The stuttering, staccato hurst of a "Bren" gun filled the afternoon with death music. The guard spun around, let his weapon slip to the ground and fell face down. Inside the prison, alert guards opened up with their "tomic" cannons, filling the street with bursts of flying blocks and powder dust. Somewhere a woman screamed with pain and a Venusian peasant whirled around and dropped in his tracks, his arm a twisted, bloody stump.

Lawton acted purely by instinct. He dropped to the pavement, crawled under the prison car and grasped the frame beneath with both hands. He drew himself up swiftly until he was well hidden under the vehicle. *Why didn't they blast the car?*

The firing stopped abruptly. A voice came from near the corner of a building, half a block away.

"Guards of the prison. Listen to me."

It was a girl's voice, clear and pleasant.

Silence again, then a gruff voice came from within the prison.

"Where is the prisoner? Turn him over to us or we will blast the entire section with the 'tomic' cannon."

They meant business in there, Lawton decided. Vista prison guards were noted for their willingness to destroy anything in the line of duty.

The girl's voice came again, and she was laughing.

"Fools—the prisoner escaped by himself. You certainly do not see him, do you?"

No answer.

"Then listen to me," the girl said again. "I will show myself. The shooting was the fault of my brother. His Brent gun exploded by mistake. I want to make amends. Surely you wouldn't shoot a girl under a flag of truce."

"Come out then, and let us see you," was the reply.

Through the opening along the entrance ramp of the car, Lawton could see her coming, a slim, lithesome figure clad in the rags of a peasant. Her curly, chestnut hair blew behind her in the breeze. She walked with the swift grace of a noblewoman and her lips were very dark and red as they formed more words.

"See—I am Marta, a woman of the quarter."

She kept coming and the guns remained silent.

"I will enter the prison and explain all. My brother and I meant no harm."

She held the makeshift white flag over her head, marching bravely toward the slitted, bolted door.

Just opposite the car, without a sound, she whirled and started to run swiftly toward the vehicle.

IT WAS difficult for Lawton to see just what happened after that. He heard the cry of alarm from within the prison, then the car jerked into motion and he was busy holding tightly to the underside of it. He felt the air rush past him and the explosion of "tomic" shells just beyond. He knew the girl hadn't had time to enter the car. She must be on the entering ramp, the control levers grasped through the window. The day was filled with the sharp, ugly crack-crack of the "tomic" cannon. Then they lost the range and the car whirled around a corner. It halted, and an urgent voice said:

"Get out of there quickly. We haven't much time."

There wasn't time to question her now. The guards would say that he had escaped. He would be shot for killing one of them.

He dropped to the pavement, rolled over and came up. He climbed into the car. She was there already, and before he sat down, she had slammed the power lever in and they shot forward, jets wide open.

"Call me Gloria," she said, "but not now. I'll be too busy to talk or listen."

In spite of the position they were in, she seemed calm, almost pleased with herself. The car whipped around to Ronda Drive and shot ahead, outdistancing all other traffic. She opened the banshee siren and the scream filled the drive with confusion. The prison car had a clear right-of-way.

"Where did you come from? Who are you?"

Her eyes stared straight ahead, her hands seemed glued to the wheel.

"Never mind. Listen carefully. We will leave this car at the end of the drive. Beyond there, an open field is visible. In the field, a large deserted tower stands. In the tower, freedom. Later, we will talk."

They were near the end of Ronda Drive. Ahead, a partly constructed Crystalla tower looked like a broken finger reaching to the sky. The car screamed to a halt.

They started to run across the field. Behind them, several banshee whistles sounded. The prison guards were close.

Suddenly she slipped, grasped his arm and fell before he could catch her. She was on her feet, her face white, lips twisted with pain.

"My ankle."

"I'll carry you."

She pushed him away.

"I'll make it."

SHE tried to run, and fell again. He gathered her up in his arms and her warmth surged through him. He kept on running. She was light, cuddled to him, her arm about his neck.

He heard the "tomic" cannons fire again, and knew the guards had reached the end of the field. They were shooting at him, a lone target in an empty field. He didn't dare look back.

"Hurry-hurry."

He did his best, knowing somehow that she was holding him tighter than necessary, frightened of her because she was the first woman he had seen or held for so long.

The Crystalla hulding loomed up in front of him and his boots pounded up the steps and into a vast, empty hall. "Tomic" shells hit the Crystalla, shattering the wall, sending tons of the sparkling stuff down behind him.

Then a man stood before him. He halted, staring with wonder at the tanned, grinning face.

"Okay, Risk. You can give up your pleasant load now. You're both safe."

Lawton placed the girl gently on her feet. Outside, the cannon had ceased firing. The guards would be closing in, their quarry supposedly trapped. The

girl said:

"My ankle. It's hurt badly."

Lawton was still staring at the slim, handsome man before him. He hadn't been able to speak. A slow grin spread across his face. He grasped the man by both shoulders, drawing him closer to him.

"Brent—Brent Lawton, how in the name of the Crown Star did you manage it?"

Brent Lawton put one arm around the girl's waist and picked her up. He started to walk swiftly into the building.

"Move fast, Risk," he said, "I'll explain later."

In the center rotunda, where the roofless building gave quick access to the sky, a slim cylinder of mono-metal was poised for the take-off. Once inside, Brent Lawton closed the safety lock and yanked the motor jets open. The building quivered and trembled under the surge of power. Together, they sat in the tiny control room, not speaking, each wondering what tales they would have to exchange. The ship left the building and roared upward into the sunlight. Below, irate, bewildered guards of Vista stopped their advance to stare upward and curse their ill luck. Risk Lawton, at least for the present, was again a free man.

THE room in which Brent, the girl and he sat was small, but rich with tapestry, pottery of Yannan quality, and was filled with huge comfortable furniture. Brent had discouraged any conversation while serving men brought steaming platters of yew meat and dish after dish of Venusian vegetable tubers, fine fruit and ale. Now, with the girl at his side, Brent put aside his knives and talked. His voice was smooth and confident.

"Risk, you'll be wondering how I learned of your return?"

Risk nodded, but his brother continued before he could speak.

"My information is gathered through one of the most intricate spy webs on Venus. I have to know what's going on in my business."

Risk Lawton wondered what business his brother referred to. Brent seemed to be well-hidden here, with men and weapons. It was far different than the office Brent had labored in when he, Risk Lawton, went away.

Brent smiled.

"You're wondering where all the glitter came from," he said. "Prepare your blue blood for a shock, Risk. You were rescued by the loveliest little pirate wench this side of Yannan. She works for me, as do a hundred other men and girls in various cities near Vista. It was through her that I heard of your return. I gave her the rescue plan and had just time to arrive when you entered the deserted building. You owe your life to Gloria Sheen."

Risk Lawton's eyes traveled to the girl. She was even more lovely now, with the peasant clothing discarded, her figure clothed in skin tight battle uniform. He thought he saw a spark of interest glowing in her eyes.

"I owe more to Miss Sheen than I can ever hope to repay," he said.

He heard Brent chuckle, and he didn't like the sound. It was hard, even bitter. Brent's hand closed over the girl's.

"You're a handsome young devil, Risk. Those five years did you a lot of good. Just in case Gloria and you might become attracted to each other . . ."

Risk Lawton saw the girl stiffen, her eyes grow cold.

"Just in case," Brent repeated, "remember that she bought her life from me. She would be dead by now if I

hadn't protected her. Gloria Sheen, to tell you the whole truth, was once known as Gloria Burton."

"Commander Burton's daughter?"

Brent nodded.

"As you probably know by now, Burton and his regime faced a blood purge."

Risk could see the girl wince at Brent's words, as though she felt the lash of a whip.

"I saw the girl's likeness in the Vista Telo-Call, and made it my business to bring her here to safety. She's been very loyal and, I might say, even affectionate."

Gloria Burton, alias Sheen, sprang to her feet.

"If you go on talking that way, I'll—I'll . . ."

Brent didn't move, but his face was suddenly cold with fury.

"You'll—do—what?"

She faltered, then sat down again.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she said. "I am grateful. It's just—well—sometimes you say very cruel things. I still have some pride."

THEY were very quiet. Risk Lawton could see the great change that had taken place in his brother. The face could be cruel, the mouth hard. His words were harsh and full of threat.

"Look here, Brent," he said suddenly. "It's none of my business, about you I mean. I'm thankful for your combined help. I could have rotted in that prison. Now I'm free and I've found you. You're the man I had to find, to supply identification papers to the new Commander. A few words from you and some of our family papers will re-establish me with Flight. When can we return to Vista?"

To his surprise, Brent leaned back in his chair and slapped his knee with an open palm. He laughed loudly.

"Return to Vista? Never," he said. "I thought Gloria might have told you about me. Evidently she hasn't?"

Risk shook his head.

"We had no time to talk."

"Good," Brent said. "Now, listen carefully. I know you're on the spot with Commander Shurley. It happens that I'm also one object he would like to remove from the Venusian scenery."

Gloria had arisen and was moving about the room quietly, arranging dishes, staying away from them both.

"I," Brent said bitterly, "have taken up the pastime of robbing ships of the Commander's fleet. I find the task very interesting and profitable."

Risk was on his feet, leaning forward slightly, arms crossed.

"I don't get it," he said.

"But you do," Brent said slowly. "I am a space pirate, and a very successful one. I have destroyed every family paper we ever had and broken all ties. Shurley is after my neck. I can't identify you, and if I could, Shurley would hang me rather than accept me as a witness."

Suddenly Risk Lawton found himself hating his brother for what he had done. He wanted to flee to Yannan, to hide there. The papers were gone, and Brent had destroyed his last chance to get a clean slate once more.

"Brent Lawton," he said slowly, "you were a successful man. You tossed decency to the wind and made a damned fool of yourself. In addition to that, you've taken away all the life I might have lived here on Venus. For five years I sweated it out on that rotting satellite Corpus. Now I come back to find that I have no background, no family. My brother is a sneaking, filthy space pirate."

BRENT didn't leave his chair. His smile was forced and his lips were

straight and white.

"You can join with me," he said. "That's why I brought you here. You can make real money and have as much glory as you want. It's a free, rich life. How about it?"

"That," Risk said, "is what you offer me—a life of running away. Running away from the very men I want to work with. Running from the country I have sworn to fight for and protect."

Brent nodded.

"It shouldn't be hard to make a choice. Riches and excitement, or filth and poverty."

Gloria Sheen stood directly behind Brent. Her eyes, wide and tear-filled, were not for him. She stared straight at Risk.

"An easier decision couldn't be imagined," Risk said slowly. "The sooner you let me out of this snake's nest, the sooner I can be on my way home to Yannan."

Brent sprang to his feet, leaning forward, hands on the table.

"You're a fool, Risk. I'll give you time to think it over. I saved your neck and brought you here to safety. I've offered you half of everything I own. You turn it down and insult me in the bargain. Perhaps you'll change your mind."

"And if I don't?"

Brent smiled. His hands balled into fists. He straightened.

"Perhaps you'll go to Yannan," he said icily, "and—perhaps you won't leave here alive."

Risk Lawton felt his face grow hot.

"Why, you dirty . . ."

He started to spring forward, and heard Gloria's warning cry as he moved. Something bit his head a terrific blow from the side, and he went down. He tried to struggle to his feet and saw a huge, grinning face above him. One of Brent's bodyguards, he thought. The

face wavered in his vision and a booted foot caught him full on the cheek. He groaned with the stinging pain and the room blacked out around him.

He heard Brent's voice, far away, filled with sarcasm.

"Think it over, *hero*."

RISK LAWTON awakened, fighting the torrent of water that poured down his face. He struggled for a moment, trying to orient his thoughts. Then he was conscious of soft arms around his shoulders, a finger tracing lines on his cut cheek.

"Don't cry out or you'll betray us."

It was Gloria's voice, soft and reassuring. He stared up at her gentle eyes.

"Don't try to talk," she whispered.

"Listen closely. It is night. Brent locked you in one of the log cells. He doesn't expect you to awaken before morning."

As she talked, he felt the cool finger and the soothing salve she rubbed into his cuts.

"Tonight we will escape. Brent lied to you. He hasn't destroyed the family records. He once told me they were in the Red Box. The box is locked in his safe."

The records—safe?

A wild joy spread through him. Then he still had a chance to clear himself with Commander Lanns Shurley. He could go free, to fight again with the Venus Flight.

"I—I can't thank you enough," he said.

She seemed suddenly shy.

"Don't thank me. You spoke up to Brent. You aren't like him." She shuddered. "You see, I've seen enough cowards and traitors. I had to help. Had to try to save you from a fate you don't deserve. The others—like my father . . ."

She choked back a sob.

"I know," he said softly.

He did know how she felt. A girl alone, betrayed by her own father. Left to the doubtful mercy of a pirate.

She brushed tears from her eyes and bit her lip. Now the light was better in the crude hut. He could see the dirt floor, the heavy, hand-hewed timbers.

"Wait an hour for me," she said suddenly. "The others will be asleep. I'll lead you to safety."

Before he could thank her again she was gone. The door opened and closed silently and the lock slipped into place. Risk Lawton sat quietly on the floor, waiting, wondering.

The cavern was strange to Lawton. Mere so now, for he was entering it at night, with a strange girl as his guide. He knew that her safety and his own lay in the small ray-pistol she had handed him in the shadows of the prison hut.

"Try not to use it," she cautioned. "It would make your escape more difficult."

He went forward slowly, her hand on his arm, leading him from one dark tunnel to the next. At last he recognized the wide, metal door that led directly to Brent's quarters. He waited while Gloria Sheen produced a key.

"We were together this evening," she said. "I stole it from him then."

For some reason, Lawton felt angry with the girl for being with his brother. With her close to him, her hand pressing the key into his hand, the anger left. In its place came pity. Pity for a helpless girl who had only a space pirate and the memory of a disloyal father to comfort her.

The door opened under the force of his hand. He slipped inside and saw moonlight, streaming down a narrow, barred tunnel, making weird designs across the plain floor. He remembered the layout of the room well, for he had

been here talking with Brent Lawton tonight.

HE MOVED across the room. Gloria Sheen started to follow him, but he motioned her back. He could see Brent's bedroom, and the relaxed figure of his brother sprawled across the bed.

He was ashamed of what he was doing. Somehow there was something wrong with all this. Sneaking into your brother's home to steal from him. What matter if his brother was a pirate. Or if the records were partly his.

Yet, to clear himself with Commander Lanns Shurley, he must identify himself positively. Gloria said the family records were in the red box, in the safe.

He was in the room now, gun safely in his pocket where he could not be startled into firing at Brent, his eyes on Brent, ready to spring if his brother moved.

Gloria had said the safe was behind the screen, built into the rock.

"It is a strange box, old-fashioned but well made."

Risk had been eager.

"With the crest of a flying comet and the house name of Lawton?"

She had nodded yes, and Risk Lawton had breathed easier. Brent had kept the old family safe. He remembered the combination well.

He reached the wall, and the room was still deadly silent. He drew away the screen and saw the door, black against the dark wall, the red crest of a comet dashing across the sky of Venus, and the name LAWTON worked into the metal surface.

Quickly he found the arrangement of buttons concealed under the lower edge of the box. He had been reciting the combination to himself ever since Gloria Sheen had first come to the prison hut.

"Press five-seven and ten. Press

ten-seven and—two."

He counted the ten buttons carefully, then pressed them slowly, careful to make no sound. The door sprang open. He reached inside, fumbling for the box. He had seen it once, in his father's possession. He knew that his father, on his death bed, had given the box to Brent.

The box was small, hardly over ten inches long by five wide. He had never seen the interior. Inside, his father had placed family records that would identify him beyond doubt.

He closed the door hurriedly and clutching the box under his arm, started to retreat.

"Not so fast, Risk. This visit was unexpected, to say the least."

The box was under his left arm. His right hand streaked to his pocket and the ray-pistol came upward in one lightning stroke.

"It's a draw," Brent said, and switched on the light. "I wouldn't fire, Risk. We'd both die together. No use in wiping out the family in one stroke like this."

Brent Lawton was still on the bed. He had thrown the covers down and was sitting with legs crossed, body clad in bright green pajamas. In his left hand he held a wicked looking "tomic" gun, his right hand was still hovering near the light switch.

"Well, Risk," his lips curled into a sneer. "Say something. Don't stand there looking like a chastised school boy. What explanation have you for prowling like a thief in the night?"

RISK LAWTON, staring down at the confident man on the bed, felt his temper rising. Brent had no right to lie to him about the box. He had no right now, to ignore the reason for Risk's presence. Risk Lawton wanted to be accepted as a citizen of good

standing, a warrior for Venus. It hadn't been his choice to come in this manner for what was rightfully his.

"I'm going out," he said suddenly. "I asked you for a fair chance. You said the papers were destroyed."

Brent nodded.

"Incidentally, Risk, how did you know about the box?"

Risk felt his cheeks redden slowly.

"I see," Brent said. "I have a traitor in the camp, do I? It wouldn't be Gloria, would it?"

Unconsciously, Risk let his eyes stray toward the door, toward the other room where Gloria still waited.

"I thought so," Brent said. He slipped out of bed swiftly, the gun never wavering, and started to back toward the wall. "Listen, Risk," he said coldly. "Gloria Sheen is the daughter of a traitor. Do you expect her to be any better than her father? Look in the box. I said the papers were gone. See for yourself. The box is empty."

For a second, Risk Lawton's eyes wavered, then he looked down at the box.

"Risk—look out."

It was Gloria, her voice full of terror, rushing toward him through the door. Brent's gun sized twice and he felt the intense heat shoot past his head. Gloria's cry had spoiled Brent's aim. Risk dropped to the floor and rolled over quickly, bringing the bed between him and his brother.

He heard Brent utter an oath and saw him whip around to Gloria.

"You—dirty . . ."

Brent's gun spoke and Gloria sank to the floor with a moan.

Risk Lawton came to his feet swiftly.

"Brent," he shouted. "Shoot fast. I'm giving you an even break."

Brent came around, the lever of his "tomic" gun pressed down. The flame blasted a red hot trail across the wall,

toward Risk. Risk waited coolly. The flame sped toward him and he saw the cold, furious death message in Brent's eyes. He watched those eyes, and pressed the lever of his own gun. Brent didn't make a sound. The gun dropped from his fingers and he went down slowly, his body slumping on top of the girl.

Risk Lawton put the gun away. His eyes were dull. His heart pounded unreasonably. He hadn't meant to kill Brent. When Brent shot Gloria, something blew up inside him. He knew he would kill Brent. Knew it as surely as he knew victory when only half way through the battle.

HE MOVED around the end of the bed to the couple on the floor. He drew Brent's body aside gently and turned it over, so Brent's eyes stared past him, up at the ceiling. He knelt beside Gloria Sheen. She was alive. Blood ran from the wound in her left side. The ray hadn't penetrated deeply. He tore the sleeve out of his shirt and wrapped it around her tightly. His feelings toward her were mixed. Thus far, he could think only of Brent. His brother was a pirate, but family blood is precious. He had killed his brother.

Suddenly he remembered the box. Brent had said that Gloria was lying. That the box was empty.

The girl was safe for the time being. He stood up and walked across the room to the spot he had dropped the red box. He stopped abruptly to stare down at it on the floor. His fists clenched tightly and his mouth, usually relaxed and smiling, straightened into hard lines.

The fall had sprung the cover and the box lay open on the floor. It was empty.

For a full minute he stared at it, then kicked it against the wall with sudden fury. He turned and lifted Brent's

body to the bed. He wanted to rush from the place, leaving Brent and the girl alone. He wanted to go into the forest and hide like a frightened, shamed animal. Yet there was something bonest and sincere on the face of the unconscious girl. Something that warned him not to be a fool.

He reached down and slung her over his shoulder roughly. He turned back at the door, and saw the box again, the cover fallen closed, laying on an angle against the wall. He wasn't sure why, but he felt that he should take the box with him—show Gloria Sheen that she had been wrong. How useless it had been for him to murder for its possession. In a few swift strides he crossed the room once more, scooped the box up and went out into the tunnel.

In five minutes he was in the forest—working his way over the twin peaks of the Bitzert Mountains, toward the province of Yunnan, and his old home.

Risk Lawton stood beneath the huge Yanno tree, staring with unhappy eyes from the cliff, across the valleys toward home. Yunnan was no longer home.

Once, in the green valley of the Moon River, Lawton spires had risen proud and straight, the finest estate in the Province. Before Risk Lawton left for the service, and Corpus, Drake Lawton, his father, died in a raid against Mars. Six months later, his mother followed and was buried in the high gravel hills above the Moon River.

Risk had no claim to the estate. That went to his brother Brent, two years his senior. Before Risk left for Corpus, word came that Brent had sold everything and gone into the Bitzert Mountains. Now, Risk knew why.

There was no reason why he should come back like this to Yunnan. Inside him was a wild, uncertain hope that someone, something would be waiting for him.

YANNAN was rich, and people here lived gently, without war and strife. Risk Lawton had come out of the foothills and stood for a long time, staring straight ahead, drinking in the idle, green beauty of the land. Suddenly a voice disturbed him.

"This—is your home?"

He was suddenly angry. Angry because he should have been able to ignore the girl without it troubling him. Angry because she reminded him that his last family tie was gone, that it was his own fault and partially hers as well. He turned and stared at her. Gloria was seated under the tree where he had placed her. Her side was better now. She looked content and her eyes were bright.

"It was my home," he said. "I have no right here now."

She stood up slowly and he saw her bite her lip to hide the pain of her wound. She walked toward him and stared beyond, at Yannan. She caught her breath.

"Risk," she said suddenly, "you love this land very much, don't you."

It wasn't a question and she didn't expect an answer. Try as he might, he couldn't let her alone with his eyes. Here on the edge of his own land, her delicate face framed by the green hills and the blue lakes beyond the cliff, she was more desirable than he had ever before noticed. She remained silent. Finally he spoke to her:

"I lost my last chance at Yannan when Brent died."

She turned and looked at him soberly.

"You blame me for that?"

He shook his head.

"I blame myself," he said. "Brent had no papers in the box. I shouldn't have listened to you. Now he's dead. I murdered my own brother."

Her eyes flashed.

"Risk—you didn't murder him. Brent was bad. Bad all the way through. If I hadn't warned you in time, he would have shot you in the back. I was wrong about the box, but only because Brent lied to me. I heard him say that the family identifications were in the box."

He said nothing. As he stared toward the valley of the Moon River, memories flooded back. The day his father had seen him enter the service.

"The penal colonies are tough, boy," his father had said. "Stick it out on Corpus. When you come home, you'll be proud of taking your place with the Honor Flight. The best flyers on Venus are there waiting to shake your hand."

The best flyers of Venus, he thought bitterly. I'm a murderer, haunted by the ghost of my own brother. I haven't a family. I'm a man wanted by the prison of Vista, without even a name to place on the prison records.

"I'm proud of you, Risk," his mother had said. Six months later she was dead, and he had helped lower her into her grave.

"I'm going to the Moon River," he said suddenly. He spoke loudly, and hardly recognized his own voice. "I've got something to do there. I can't leave you . . ."

Gloria Shoen tried to smile.

"You took me safely from Brent's gang," she said. "I'll manage from here on. You needn't worry about me."

HE LET her turn away and start back on the trail toward the mountains. She went out of sight on the trail. He turned toward Yannan. He had to go back to the estate—to see his mother's grave, and spend some time there, asking forgiveness.

Something kept him from starting. Made him look back up toward the

rugged, dark mountains through which he had made his way. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Gloria," he called.

The mountains echoed and the echo died.

He started after her swiftly, and called her name once more. Then he broke into a swift run.

He found her a short distance up the trail, curled up with her head resting on a gnarled stump. The wound in her side was open again and the bandage was red with blood. He approached softly and saw that she was crying. Her shoulders rose and fell slowly and he heard her long, drawn out sobs.

Without a word, he knelt and took her into his arms. He went back along the trail toward Yannan and her head was cushioned against his chest. After a while, when she had controlled her tears, she looked up at him with misty eyes.

"You didn't have to—"

"I couldn't leave you behind," he said abruptly. "I owe this much to Brent's memory."

She didn't speak again, but he felt her small body stiffen in his arms.

Feeling like a prowler, Risk Lawton climbed the high, vine clad wall of Lawton Spires and stared with dismay at the wreckage within. The great hall was a series of broken walls and ugly gashes where the windows had been. The spires, tall, graceful "vapor-glass" affairs that had given the place its name and reputation for perfection, were utterly destroyed. The entire place was a mass of black, hattle scarred rubble.

He had never heard of a war touching Yannan.

He helped the girl over the wall and they made their way into the remains of the great hall.

He remembered the vast carved tables where his father dined his guests,

the library where Brent and he studied their lessons, the rooms, each of them containing a special memory, all of them wrecked.

He stood at last by the grave of his mother and Gloria Sheen came closer to him, placing her hand in his.

"Risk—I meant to tell you. I couldn't, not when you were so angry."

The full meaning of her words came slowly. When he turned to her, his eyes were dull, humble.

"You—knew about this?"

She nodded.

"Brent?"

She nodded once more.

"Brent sold this place to a friend of his—a handit from the asteroid ring. The man wouldn't pay Brent after he established his headquarters here. Brent brought his men in war-rockets, at night. They blasted the entire building to the ground. Risk—I've tried to tell you that Brent never had a soul. That he was . . ."

She shuddered.

FOR the first time, he was beginning to see what a fool he had been for blaming her. To realize that he was *glad* that Brent was dead. Proud that he had killed him.

Brent had not cared about the Spires. He had sold them, sold his own mother's grave, and then blasted it from the skies because he didn't receive his money.

Brent had saved Gloria Burton's life, only to keep her in bondage—threaten to turn her over to her father's enemies if she didn't do as he wished.

Risk Lawton stared down at the burned sod, the tell-tale depression in the center of his mother's grave. Even the grave had been neglected, forgotten. He took Gloria into his arms and kissed her on the forehead, gently, as he would kiss his mother.

"I couldn't forget my own selfishness," he said. "I wanted what I thought was in that box, and it hurt so much not to find it that I blamed you. If you'll forgive . . ."

She snuggled closer.

"There's nothing to forgive," she said. "The box was empty, and Brent must have lied to me. The red box brought only death."

He knew that she still had it, tucked securely beneath her arm.

"Why don't you destroy it—toss it away?"

"Because it's sort of a symbol of what we've gone through—together."

"All of which is very touching."

The sudden rasping voice, the movement of feet upon gravel behind him, and Risk Lawton sprung away from the girl, his weapon drawn. He was too late. The bank dropped away abruptly to the river. Below them, the men had crouched where they could not be seen. Risk Lawton found himself staring into the barrel of an auto machine-gun. Behind the gun stood a huge man in the uniform of the Honor Flight, the highest group in the Venusian Fleet.

The ugly face, the red, murderous eyes belonged to his old enemy on Corpus, Meteor Braskett.

"Sorry we couldn't stay for the full performance," Braskett said in a hard flat voice. "The Commander has a date with you, in Vista."

Two sub-warriors scrambled up the bank. Lawton dropped the pistol. He placed one arm around Gloria Sheen's waist. The sub-warriors, their pistols drawn, stood on either side of Lawton and the girl.

"Lann Shurley thought you'd show up here sooner or later," Braskett said. "He knew I would recognize you. In fact, I'm the only man in the fleet who would. We've been waiting here for two days."

A slow smile touched Lawton's lips. "Quite clummy with the Commander, aren't you, Braskett?"

The two guards looked puzzled. They had also noticed the familiar manner in which their superior had used Commander Lann Shurley's name.

Braskett's face turned dull red.

"You keep your mouth shut, see," he said. "Remember that my name is Lawton. Risk Lawton of the Honor Flight. On the books, you are an unnamed prisoner, escaped from Vista Prison and guilty of shooting down a guard."

Lawton's smile didn't fade. It froze on his face, cynical and hard.

"You wouldn't care to argue about that name, without a gun, would you Braskett?"

Braskett took two steps forward, the heavy gun in his hands.

"I'd shoot you down now," he said grimly. "Except the Commander wants your useless hide alive. Now, turn around and start marching."

LAWTON, his arm still around the girl, turned and went slowly toward the ruins of the Spires. Braskett's voice, brittle with anger, said:

"Leave the girl here, Prisoner. I'll take care of her."

Lawton didn't look around. He held Gloria more tightly.

"Remember, Braskett," he said, "that you are now a member of an honorable organization. The safety of the girl is most important to the Commander. He wouldn't approve, if anything happened to her."

He heard Braskett curse under his breath, and waited for the blasting power of the gun to hit his back. Braskett didn't fire. They went onward toward the Spires.

The ship was cleverly concealed. It was ready to take him back to Vista.

Back to face a murder charge. Risk Lawton, his identity stolen, his last home ties destroyed, depended now only on the love of a girl and the confidence she had in him.

Gloria Sheen, actually Gloria Burton, was the daughter of a man who had tried to betray Venus. What fate would await her in Vista?

THE COURTROOM was a somber place, hung with the gray and blue of the Honor Flight. The room itself was forty feet square, with three huge chairs arranged along one wall, directly under the flags of Venus and of the Honor Flight.

Risk Lawton had been here once before. He had heard a man sentenced to the penal colonies for betraying a flight to the enemy. Now he was back, but this time, seated in the condemned row, seated at Gloria Sheen's side, watching the judges file in from the private chambers.

Gloria had not given up hope once since Braskett brought them back to Vista. She had remained calm.

Lawton stared at her out of the corner of his eye. She still managed to look brave and the red box was still clutched in her hands.

"The Honor Flight will come to attention."

The Honor Flight, one hundred of Venus' best warriors, arose as a man and saluted as Commander Lann Shurley entered. He took his place on the middle judge's chair and lowered his hands to grasp the arms of the chair tightly. He looked down at Risk Lawton, his face expressionless.

The Honor Flight sat down.

"You have been called here to judge a very strange case," Lann Shurley said. His voice was pleasant, unhurried. He addressed the uniformed men who filled the room. "My aides and I

are here to keep order. You alone will judge this man's innocence or guilt."

At the word guilt, Gloria Burton pressed more closely to Lawton's side. He looked down at her and smiled. Shurley was speaking again.

"Only a few days ago, the man seated in the condemned row returned from the satellite Corpus. He claimed to be Risk Lawton, son of Major Lawton of the old regime. Major Lawton was well known by the men of Commander Burton's Flight. Since that time, no one remains to identify the man in the condemned row."

"Except Burton's daughter," a low voice said somewhere in the room.

Commander Lann Shurley stopped speaking abruptly and his high cheekbones showed color.

"Will the officer who said that please rise?"

MEN stared from one to the other. Slowly, Braskett arose from his place in the group. His face had turned very pale. He was ill at ease.

"Any officer of the Honor Flight should know that he cannot express his opinion until the proper time," Shurley snapped. "Officer Lawton, you are no exception. See that you control your tongue. Be seated."

Braskett sat down, but he had done himself a lot of harm. The men around him stared wonderingly, first at Shurley, then at Braskett.

The Commander had referred to the prisoner on the bench as the man who claimed to be Lawton. Here was Lawton, speaking from the Flight, and out of turn.

"No need in concealing a fact that has been made public," Shurley said. He was still flushed with anger. "The girl on the bench is Gloria Burton, daughter of the late Commander. May I hasten to explain that no shadow of

guilt falls upon Miss Burton for her father's deeds. She is here because she chose to sit with the prisoner.

"The facts of this case have been given to you all by the unit commanders of your posts."

He looked down at Risk Lawton.

"Will the prisoner arise and face the Honor Flight."

Lawton stood up. He turned to face the hundred stern faces that stared at him. He held his head proudly, yet was humbled inside by the picture he saw before him.

These men were rightfully his friends. One face in that group stood out.

Meteor Braskett, still angered by what happened, stared at Lawton with narrowed, murderous eyes.

"You see the man who says he is Lawton," Lann Shurley said. "Is there a man present who can identify him?"

Meteor Braskett stood up. He knew now what he was supposed to do. No more mistakes. The proper procedure was to march stiffly to the front of the group and come to attention before the Commander. He did so and a strange hush filled the court. Gloria Burton had released her hand from Lawton's. She sat stiff and alone, staring at Braskett with frightened, troubled eyes.

"If the officer has learned to speak correctly," Lann Shurley said, "let him tell us his story."

BRASKETT turned on the group and grinned. He winked deliberately behind the Commander's back, then sobered as he saw that the response was negative.

"This man's name is Braskett," he said. "I was guard on Corpus for five years, and just before we got off that damned satellite, this guy Braskett stole my papers. We had a hard time of it and during the flight to Vista, I

got the papers back quietly and waited for my time.

"When the Commander here," he waved at Shurley, "asked for the guard in charge of the prisoners, Braskett tried to steal the show."

Braskett laughed. It was a hoarse, unpleasant laugh.

"I kept my mouth shut until the right time came. Then I showed this Braskett up for what he's worth. Since then, he killed a guard and," Braskett paused triumphantly for an instant and shot home his final shaft, "since then I found out that he shot my own brother."

This last bit of news caused a stir among the men in the room. It was obvious that they weren't pleased by the uncouth man who called himself one of them. Yet, he had just given them something to think about.

To their amazement, Lann Shurley's expression didn't change.

"The officer may sit down," he said sternly.

Braskett was stunned. He had expected further questioning. He had hoped to dwell on the shooting of Brent Lawton, and thus build up strength for his case. He stumbled back toward his seat but the Commander halted him.

"The Officer will sit with the prisoner, on condemned row," he snapped. "A question has arisen."

Braskett pivoted abruptly.

"I'll be damned if I'll . . ."

He stopped in mid-sentence, his eyes widening in fear because of what he had dared to say. The room was hushed, shocked. Shurley came half out of his chair, then sank back, unsmiling!

"The Officer will be seated in condemned row," he said once more.

Braskett sat down quickly, only a few feet from Risk Lawton. He looked straight ahead. His heavy fists were clenched tightly at his sides.

Commander Larn Shurley left his seat and walked down into the room. He paused before Risk Lawton and Lawton stood up. He saluted, using the Honor Flight's gesture.

Shurley said:

"Lawton, you've done us a great service."

He remained silent.

"I face a difficult task," Shurley said. "Understand me, I tried to signal you that first day. Evidently you didn't notice the gesture."

Lawton remembered the wink. Remembered how puzzled he had been.

"If you had gone quietly to prison," Shurley said, "you would have been released privately and allowed to return to Yannan, your home province."

He turned away to face the Honor Flight.

"REGULATIONS are difficult," he said in a strong voice. "I am directly responsible to the people of Venus, and at times it's hard to do my duty. Regulations say that no man can remain in the Honor Flight unless he is in possession of his credentials. The Officer who calls himself Lawton had those credentials. This man has none."

He hesitated, watching Braskett. Braskett was silent, staring at the floor.

"I felt from the first," Shurley said, "that Braskett was an imposter and that this prisoner told the truth. In Braskett's case, I had only to allow him in the Honor Flight for a short period to prove to you all that he is *not* an Officer, but that he is a fool."

A chuckle ran through the room. Braskett still remained silent, but his neck was a deep crimson.

"The true Risk Lawton is a difficult problem," Shurley said. "I have traced his family and none of them remain alive. His brother, as Braskett told us, met with death a few days ago in the

Bitzert Mountains. No man could be punished for killing Brent Lawton. Brent Lawton has had a reward on his head for three years. He's done more to harm the Flight than any man alive. The man who killed him should be rewarded richly."

Gloria Burton was smiling happily. She stared up with worship in her eyes for Risk Lawton. Lawton was dumb with amazement. He waited, stiffly at attention.

"A more difficult problem arises," Shurley said. "This man will be sent back to Yannan, the place he claims as his home. I do not doubt his word, but without the papers that Braskett holds, I have no choice. Lawton, if that is truly his name, will be retired. He cannot serve in the Honor Guard until such time as proof of his family affiliation can be produced."

"And that will be never," Lawton said slowly.

His voice was low, but it carried beyond Shurley and reached the Honor Flight.

Braskett came to his feet slowly.

"You don't need me here," he said. "So I was wrong. But you ain't proved that he is Lawton. I'll keep on saying he ain't and you can't prove he is."

Something snapped inside Risk Lawton.

In that single instant when his emotions ruled, he was past Shurley and at Braskett's neck.

The man went down snarling, his thick finger groping for Lawton's throat. They rolled over and over on the floor, and for some strange reason, no man moved to interfere.

Gloria Burton was running toward them, and Commander Shurley, his face a stern mask, saw Braskett draw a slim knife from his pocket.

Before anyone could cry out, the knife flashed upward. Gloria Burton

screamed and fell forward, across both men. The box she still clutched in her hand, fell between the fighters. The knife hit it and slipped through the bottom, and up through the cover. Its point touched Lawton's chest and brought blood.

LAWTON had missed the meaning of Gloria's sudden dash to his side. Now he saw it, the keen, red tipped blade that fell to the floor. With one smashing blow, he sent Braskett's head against the floor. Braskett's neck twisted savagely and his cheek bones cut into Risk Lawton's knuckles. Braskett was still.

Lawton stood up very slowly, leaning on the girl's shoulder.

"Thanks," he said, but he meant more than that. He couldn't talk now, but his eyes told her.

It was Commander Lann Shurley who knelt quickly at Braskett's side and picked up the red box. He tore the knife from it and the box fell apart in his hands. He ripped the broken part away and brought out an inner lining of soft, plia-metal.

Risk Lawton stared hard at the small, square plia-metal plate lying in Shurley's hand.

On the surface, placed there long before his memory had become reliable, were the fingerprints of a baby's hand. On the far side of the plate was a second set of prints.

"The mold of the bands of Brently Lawton, placed here by his mother, Flora Lawton and his father, Major Lawton of the famous Venus Honor Flight."

Under the other set, were approximately the same words, with one difference. They were his fingerprints of "Rickly Lawton."

Here before him, hidden under the

false lid in the red box of death, was the family record of his birth, preserved in a manner that would be accepted by Venusian officials for all time.

He was conscious only of the pride that surged through him when Commander Lann Shurley offered him congratulations and named him a member of the Flight.

Then he was in the hall, outside the courtroom, and for the first time since they left Lawton Spires, Gloria was once more in his arms.

"You've got what you wanted," she said softly. "I suppose you'll want to go at once to the Honor Flight? You're a fighter, Risk. You certainly won't need me."

He held her more tightly and felt his pulse race.

"Even a member of the Honor Flight has to have leave long enough for a honeymoon."

He kissed her, not so tenderly, but with great sincerity.

"We'll rebuild Lawton Spires," she said.

"We'll populate it with little Lawtons, and make sure that they have a complete family record etched on the biggest and most beautiful mountain in Yannan, where the whole planet can see. No son of mine is going to find himself betrayed by—"

"Just a minute," she pleaded. "You're working yourself up over something that will never happen."

She smiled.

"Anyhow, don't you think you're counting your chickens a little too fast?"

He blushed at that.

"Well," he admitted cautiously. "Maybe, a little. Don't you think we ought to get started?"

"For Yannan," she said, and linked her arm through his.

THE END

The WIDOW'S GHOST



By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT



IN 1882, a family which we will call the Mortons to avoid publicity involved in any psychic story, moved into a home in the small town of Bognor on the southern coast of England. The original owner of the house had died soon after he built it and his wife had followed him after two years of grieving. The Mortons had six children, one of the unmarried girls being the chief reporter of the mysterious visitations that began to take place very soon after the Mortons moved in. She was a medical student and made her observations in much the same manner as a research scientist studying cultures under a microscope. The first peculiar incident related by Rose happened one night when she heard a rapping on her bedroom door. She thought it was her mother, but when she opened the door to let her in, she saw in the hallway the figure of a tall body dressed all in black. Her face was practically hidden by a handkerchief which she held up in her right hand and she seemed to be weeping silently. A widow's cuff was visible on both wrists. During the next five years, the apparition was visible to all the members of the family, to the house-maids, and to the neighbors. She spent

much time in the bay window of the drawing room, looking wistfully out over the garden. She walked about throughout the house with little regard for doors. Rose would stretch strings across the stairs and on two occasions saw her walk through them. She tried to touch her but the tall lady always seemed to be just out of reach. When Rose would get her cornered and would try to pounce on her, she would just disappear. She made very little noise as she moved about. Her footsteps were light as though she were wearing felt boots. Up until 1886 she was taken as a real person by outsiders. She looked substantial and seemed to intercept light although she did not cast a shadow. The apparition must have been seen by the dogs for they were often in a state of terror. Sometimes they would come slinking in from the orchard or even from some other part of the house, and would retreat trembling under the sofa. Her visits became daily after a couple years and then started to become less frequent. After about seven years, her figure was less substantial and distinct. Finally, without ever speaking a word, she vanished, never to return to the Morton home again.

DRUID RENAISSANCE



By M. E. STANTON



IN THESE troubled times, many new cults have come into being. And as many old ones have been revived. Old religious rites, long since forgotten, have popped into the minds of peoples so sorely disturbed over the world's woes. All over devastated Europe, a religious revival has taken place.

In England, a fascinating event has occurred. The Druids, the sacred cult of the Kelts and the early inhabitants of the British Isles before, during and after, Roman times, are once again a reality.

Who has not seen pictures of the Great Stonehenge in Suffolk, and who has not looked on it, asking himself, what manner of people worshipped before this immortal shrine? Druidism embodied some noble and some decadent habits, but regardless, we can have as much admiration for the practitioners of this rite, as we can have for the early Greeks. The Greeks left us an heritage in the form of magnificent art work and architecture. The Druids left us only a series of open-air stone temples, with very little of their actual rites. Nevertheless, we can see in the huge stone structures some of the marvelous workings of the human mind.

For example, the Great Stonehenge is so ori-

ented, that one of the keystones lines up with the date of the vernal equinox, or rather, with the sun's position on that date with excellent accuracy. Such skill cannot but be admired.

While we know that the Druids engaged in some horrible sacrificial rites, we are also aware of the fact that they were very near nature. The structure of their temples assures us of that. Not for them was the covered place of worship. Rather, they preferred to be out in the open where all nature could gaze down at them and where they could feel themselves akin with the green and nascent livingness.

The present-day practitioners of Druidism engage in no orgies. Instead, they stimulate their forbears' love of nature and natural phenomena. Dancing about the trees, wandering in the forests, and otherwise linking themselves with the mysteries of Mother Earth, the Druids are reviving a love of simplicity and a panacea for their ills in the mixed-up civilization of which they are an undesired part.

We may stand aside and wonder, but we cannot ignore any who are bold enough to declare by their actions, not by their words, that the way of the world is not good.

FOUNTAIN OF CHANGE

By Chester S. Geier &
Richard S. Shaver

**The fountain offered
youth and beauty, but
slavery was its price.**

I WATCHED her as she drove the green Buick convertible, wondering what there was about her that held me with almost hypnotic fascination. Althea Armora was beautiful in a sleek, almost serpentine way, but it was more than her beauty that drew me. Perhaps it was her ivory pallor, the voluptuous set of her red lips, the light of sophisticated devilry that seemed to lurk in her dark eyes.

No normal man could help but be attracted to her. And this alone should have warned me . . . this and the thin, flaring nostrils that hinted of latent cruelty; the full lips that told of a sensuous nature bordering on sadism; the heavy-lidded, slumbrous eyes that spoke of dark hungers and darker emotions. I should have been warned—but I was fascinated.

We drove over a narrow gravel road that ran toward the coast, winding among the mountains that cut the settlement of Malvern off from the sea. It



A cold smile played across her face as she watched the



Two men battle before the pulsing surge of the fountain . . .

was a wild and rocky region, inhabited for the most part by wealthy families who preferred it for its privacy and isolation. For this reason Malvern was an exclusive place. Outsiders were kept at a distance by exorbitantly high fees and numerous No Trespassing signs. The only way to gain admission into the inner circles was as the guest of someone already a member. It was by this route that I had entered the narrowly restricted society of Malvern—I hardly had the social or financial position to have made it possible otherwise. Getting Bill Camberton to invite me up had not been difficult, for our service with the Army during the war had made us the best of friends. But Bill Camberton, despising the indolent life of his own kind and utilizing the seclusion of Malvern only to indulge his passion for painting, in no other way enters this account.

As a guest of the Cambertons, I had been generally accepted as a person of considerable financial affluence—an illusion which I saw no reason to dispel. I had been invited to numerous parties and dances, at which I had met and had become acquainted with Althea Armora, whose family was well situated in the upper brackets of Malvern. As I have said, she fascinated me, and this fascination had culminated in the trip we were now making in the convertible.

Our destination was a somewhat mysterious estate called the Eyrie. A strange secrecy appeared to be connected with the place. Much of what I had learned of it had come in the form of veiled hints or references. My curiosity had been aroused, and when Althea had offered to take me there, I had eagerly accepted.

The gravel road we were following branched off into one of hard-packed earth that angled steeply upward. Althea swung the convertible into this

and followed it for a time. Presently, I saw that we had reached the coast, and that we were actually moving along the lip of a cliff that dropped sharply down to the water. Waves crashed on the rocks far below, their dull roars mingling with the cries of circling sea gulls. Added to the sullen, gray sky and the forbidding aspect of the landscape, there was something ominous about the sounds.

ALTHEA caught my glance and gestured with one slim white hand. The stiff breeze that blew in from the water had brought a faint flush to her ivory cheeks and was making her dark curls dance. "You can see the Eyrie now," she said. "It's up there."

From this height, clear of the obstructions of the surrounding peaks, the Eyrie had become visible. It stood upon a steep crest that jutted out into the sea, its towers and walls limned starkly against the sky. Medieval in appearance, it looked like a baron's stronghold; and it had quite probably cost a small fortune to build.

As I gazed, I found myself speculating upon the residents and the nature of the Eyrie. Althea had revealed nothing aside from her offer to take me there. Judging from what I had been able to learn, the Eyrie was a club or resort of some kind, for a large number of wealthy people were frequent visitors, their visits in many cases occupying considerable periods of time.

I was jolted from my introspections as Althea brought the convertible to a sudden stop. She drew the collar of her fur coat up around her throat, glanced at me briefly, and said, "Cigarette, Edward."

I passed her one, lighted it, and then lighted another for myself. Inwardly I was tense—her stopping had some purpose. She blew a plume of smoke,

gazed briefly up at the Eyrie, then turned her dark eyes back to me.

"Still want to go up there, Edward?"

"Why not?" I asked, puzzled.

"It's a question of courage," she said. "If you're afraid, say so and we'll go back."

"I don't understand," I said. "You didn't bring this up before. If there's anything to be afraid of, I certainly don't know what it is."

She tapped ash from her cigarette with a slow, deliberate movement. "I . . . well, I suddenly got to thinking, Edward. You're a rather decent sort. . . ."

"Look here," I said. "Just what is this all about? Why all the hush-hush and mumbo-jumbo?"

"I can't tell you. You'll find out when you visit the Eyrie. But then it'll be too late to back out."

"Out of what, Althea?"

"I just can't tell you."

I DREW at my cigarette, fighting down a creeping chill. Finally I said, "If I'm supposed to be afraid of something, I don't see why you aren't also, Althea."

"I've been at the Eyrie before. I know what to expect."

"You got away in one piece, then. That doesn't seem to leave anything to be afraid of."

"There's a lot you don't know, Edward . . . about me, for one."

"I know that you're beautiful."

She laughed and tossed away her cigarette. "Well, do you still want to go up?"

I nodded. "You've made my curiosity stronger than ever."

"I was really trying to accomplish something else." She shrugged and deftly started the convertible back into motion.

We followed the cliff road to where

it began to wind up among the steep slopes of the crest upon which, at the seaward end, stood the Eyrie. The slopes were covered with scrub pines and stunted oaks and strewn with rock. As we neared the summit, curving around a turn, the natural ruggedness of the scene abruptly gave way to a more orderly and civilized appearance. The road became one of smooth concrete, lined on either side with tall pines, and slanting up and up to a tall gateway in the walls of the Eyrie.

At each side of that gateway were round, fort-like towers that emphasized the stronghold atmosphere of the place. It struck me that the Eyrie might indeed have been built to repel attack. Approach was possible only along the road, and this could easily be held from the gateway by one good machine-gunner. Perhaps there was a hidden gun.

As we approached the gateway, the tall, iron-grilled portals swung open silently, though no one was to be seen. Althea drove on through, and the gates as silently closed. I fought down a shiver—up here the wind was cold, and the mysterious Eyrie provided no welcoming warmth, only a kind of a silent, grim acceptance of our presence.

We were in a wide courtyard. Before us was the main building, massive and severe, its buttressed front broken by tall, narrow lead-paned windows. On either side of it were smaller buildings—obviously servants' quarters or storerooms. Before one of them were numerous parked cars, all large and expensive.

From here a uniformed attendant hurried up, bowing obsequiously as he reached us. Althea turned the convertible over to him, and I followed her as she strode toward a set of low, broad steps that led up to an arching metal door in the main building.

The door swung open when we came before it. A foyer was revealed, square and plain, relieved only by full-length mirrors set in the walls, and lighted softly by an ornate chandelier that hung from the beamed ceiling.

I looked at the two tall and somehow strange figures in the mirrors surrounding us. Althea's was the most striking, dark and sleek, her ivory face pale and vivid against the dusky backdrop of her wind-blown hair. Her eyes had never seemed so shadowed, nor her lips so red. And somehow, in the mirrors, her expression seemed cruel.

MY OWN figure, wide-shouldered and hulky, seemed strange, too, in that mirrored dimness. My face was ruddy with an excitement which, in the confusion of my thoughts, I had hardly felt. The strong nose above the flat lips, the harsh, wide cheekbones with deep shadows beneath, the unruly red-brown hair, the square, blocky hands clutching a brown hat, the deep-set gray eyes, a little wary and more than a little worried—all these seemed the features of another man rather than my own.

I was startled from my scrutiny as a strikingly pretty girl in a maid's costume abruptly appeared through a door at one side of the foyer. She bowed, smiling warmly, and took Althea's fur wrap. The smile seemed to freeze, however, when she reached for my hat. Her long-lashed, crystal-blue eyes fixed on me and became searchingly speculative. She had light brown hair, with warm golden tints among the thick curls, framing a small, fair, and intelligently vivid face. She was quite innocent of make-up, but with her complexion she did not need any. She had, I noticed with an oddly compelling sort of interest, a light powdering of freckles across the delicate arch of her nose.

There was something about the girl that was profoundly disturbing. She was remarkably attractive, true enough, a fact that became evident when one looked beyond the plain facade of the maid's costume she wore. But it was more than this. It was something about the directness of her eyes, the keen, vibrant alertness of her features. She was more than a mere servant, I felt certain.

The mutual, deep intentness with which we had gazed, one at the other, had lasted but instants. I did not forget Althea, realizing that she would notice the by-play should it go any further. I turned to glance at her, wondering how much she had seen. But Althea was gazing at another door, occupied with thoughts of her own. In another moment she turned to the girl in the maid's uniform and asked:

"Are we late, Thetis?"

"No, Miss Armora. But the ritual will begin soon."

The girl's voice was low and sweet, very much in keeping with her appearance. My mind stirred with curiosity regarding her name. For Thetis was the name of the sea-goddess of Grecian mythology, who was the mother of Achilles. It seemed a strange name for a modern girl. But then everything I had so far observed in this place was strange . . .

"I was speaking of Juno," Althea said, with an impatient gesture of one slim hand. "She expects me . . . for certain reasons. Is she waiting?"

THETIS nodded quickly. "In the chamber of the fountain. Is the gentleman to be indoctrinated?"

Althea hesitated, darting a quick, sidewise glance at me. Then, abruptly, as though she had reached a decision, she nodded.

"What's this indoctrination busi-

ness?" I demanded, feeling a sudden unease.

"You will learn soon enough, Edward," Althea told me. "All I can say right now is that it isn't . . . unpleasant. You came this far, you know. You might as well go the rest of the way." She threw another swift glance at the door across the foyer. "But I must hurry to get ready for the ritual. Thetis, you'll take care of the . . . the details?"

The girl bobbed her small head quickly, an odd, half-hidden eagerness shining in her crystal-blue eyes. "I'll take care of them," she said.

Althea turned to me briefly. "You go with Thetis, Edward. I'll see you soon. By then you'll understand what this is all about." With that, she turned and hurried through the door at which she had been glancing.

I turned my eyes to Thetis, sharply conscious all of a sudden that we were alone. Her eyes fell swiftly before mine, almost with guilt, as though she shared like thoughts.

"Excuse me a moment," she murmured. She went through the doorway from which she had first appeared, returning shortly without the impediments of my hat and Althea's coat. She did not look at me, but gestured for me to follow.

I felt a growing excitement as we went along the route by which Althea had previously gone. How much of this excitement was due to Thetis or to what lay ahead of me was impossible to determine.

I watched the girl as she walked several paces ahead of me, struck by the grace of her movements and the trim curves of her figure in the plain uniform—the very plainness of which served to emphasize her actual beauty. I found myself liking the way the thick curls of her light brown hair swung

about her shoulders.

Briefly, I thought of Althea. For her I had felt a fascination. But Thetis awoke other feelings in me—unusual feelings, for I am hardly a susceptible sort.

We strode through a series of broad halls, paneled in oak and covered with a thick carpet that muffled the sound of our footsteps. Frequently we passed uniformed servants of both sexes, hurrying about on mysterious errands. The girls glanced at me with a furtive curiosity—and almost, it seemed in some cases, with pity. The male servants were hard-featured individuals, their eyes filled with a shifty speculation. These latter, I felt certain, were more than mere servants. Like Thetis, they were hardly the type one would expect in such a profession.

IN ONE of the halls, we passed open doorways that led into huge, luxuriously furnished rooms, in which were groups of expensively dressed men and women who laughed and spoke as though intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. Within me grew the conviction that there was something wrong about the Eyrie—subtly and insidiously wrong. Everything I had so far seen had a jarringly off-key quality. And there was another thing that I noticed as well—an atmosphere of tense expectancy seemed to pervade the entire place, a kind of waiting hush, as though momentous events were due to occur.

Questions seethed in my mind, but Thetis' hurrying figure gave me no opportunity to voice them. She glanced at me once or twice, and as though aware of my curiosity, she shook her brown curls quickly, her crystal-blue eyes dark with warning.

The hall through which we strode at this point ended in a pair of broad oak

doors, which were elaborately carved and inlaid. Our destination evidently lay somewhere beyond them, but I was not immediately to learn what this was. For Thetis darted a searching glance behind her, apparently to make certain that we were not under scrutiny, and came to a sudden stop. She looked at me tensely, her eyes mirroring eagerness struggling with a feeling of caution. She said:

"Does the name O'Connor mean anything to you?"

I nodded gravely. "It means something, all right. The name Nancy O'Connor would mean a lot more."

"In what connection?"

"Nancy O'Connor's father, Galvin O'Connor, a scientist, had disappeared," I explained. "The girl had reason to believe that he had been kidnapped. She was a plucky kid. She had an idea where he was, and decided to investigate. But she had brains as well as nerves. She knew something might happen to her and left a letter with a friend. If she did not return within a certain time, the letter was to be taken to the state's attorney's office. She did not return."

Thetis leaned against the wall and closed her eyes. After a moment she looked at me again and smiled. "I'm Nancy O'Connor," she said. "Thetis is just one of the classical names they use here."

"That makes it official," I said. "I already guessed who you were."

"And you?"

"I'm Edward Harnes, special investigator. I was sent out to see if there was actually anything behind your letter. What is this all about?"

"There's no time to explain. I'll do that later. Right now all I can say is that you're in danger. I can help you avoid some of it, but the rest is up to you."

Nancy O'Connor reached into the bodice of her uniform and produced a small bottle. She shook a white pill into her palm. "Here—swallow this."

"What is it?"

"It's a drug that will keep you from being indoctrinated. This indoctrination business is a trick to overcome a victim's will power, make a sort of zombie out of him. You'll have to act like that happened to you. Luckily, though, the first indoctrination treatment is supposed to leave a person mentally foggy or confused, so your act won't have to be perfect . . . Now we'll have to hurry. They'll suspect us if we delay any longer."

Swallowing the pill with an effort, I followed Nancy O'Connor toward the mysterious pair of doors at the end of the hall.

CHAPTER II

AS WE approached the doors a voice suddenly spoke, seeming to issue from the empty air about us. I was startled until I realized that a hidden loudspeaker was being used. The voice said:

"Who seeks entrance to the chamber of the fountain?" The voice was low and toneless and seemed to be that of a woman, but I could not be certain.

"It is Thetis," Nancy O'Connor said in answer. "I bring with me one who is to be indoctrinated."

"Has this person been properly introduced into our circle?"

"He has," Nancy O'Connor answered again. "He is being sponsored by Althea Armora."

"The gentleman is welcome, for his coming has been expected. Enter."

Before I could mull over the implications behind the statement that my coming had been expected, the doors

opened silently. I found myself staring into a huge chamber which was filled with the mystic dimness and solemn hush of a temple. The high, arching ceiling was lost in shadows, which the subdued light from narrow, lead-paned windows, set at wide intervals along the walls, seemed to make more intense. The place was very simply furnished. A deep rug covered the expanse of stone floor, its tones blending with the heavy drapes that hung at the sides of the windows. Along the walls were life-sized statues, mounted on pedestals, which depicted figures from the classical Greek pantheon.

At the opposite end of the chamber from where we stood was a deep, apse-like recess, semi-circular in shape, the walls of which were covered by a huge tapestry that fell from the ceiling to the floor. Within the recess, a low flight of carpeted steps led up to a broad dais or platform, upon which was a bowl-shaped construction of elaborately carved marble. It could have contained a dozen men with ease. From within the center of it a thin spray of something which seemed at first glance to be water shot several feet into the air.

The spray was not water, I realized after a moment. It was too fine, too immaterial, for that. It shot into the air—and then simply vanished. It did not fall back into the bowl. It seemed a jet of light, or some force as tenuous as light. And it was rainbow-hued and vividly glowing, the colors changing and merging in a fascinating interplay of light and shades that was almost hypnotic.

A low, soft humming sound filled the chamber. It was faintly musical and came from the direction of the fountain—for such the marble bowl and the glowing spray seemed to be. The sound heightened the atmosphere of mystery

and strangeness that pervaded the room, and despite the pill Nancy O'Connor had given me, I was filled with a cold unease.

I wondered if the fountain were to play a part in my indoctrination—whatever that might be. I turned to question Nancy O'Connor, but just then a flash of movement made me stiffen tensely.

A GIRL appeared from somewhere behind the fountain and began to walk toward us with an odd deliberation. Her eyes were fixed straight before her, as though she looked through and beyond us. Her actions seemed those of an automaton, or a person in a trance. Watching her made a chill creep through me.

She was an attractive girl, tall and statuesque, her dark hair unbound and flowing about her shoulders. She wore a long white garment, sleeveless and severely simple, which was bound at the waist by a silver cord. There were silver sandals on her feet.

Nancy O'Connor whispered, "She is one of the handmaidens or attendants of Juno, the woman who calls herself the priestess of the fountain. I will have to turn you over to her." She said nothing more, but once again her crystal-blue eyes flashed their warning message.

The handmaiden came to a stop before us and inclined her head gravely. She did not seem to see us. Her dark eyes were unblinking, gazing into a far distance. She said:

"Welcome to the chamber of the fountain. The delights of indoctrination await you. Please follow me."

I glanced hesitantly at Nancy O'Connor and received another look of warning before she turned to leave. The doors closed behind her, and I was alone with the handmaiden, who pres-

ently turned and strode back in the direction from which she had come. In a gray frame of mind, I followed after her.

We skirted the fountain and came to a narrow doorway, half hidden by a part in the tapestry. The handmaiden led me inside. After what seemed only a few steps, she stopped before a curtained alcove.

"Please enter and don the garments which you will find waiting within. Then present yourself at the fountain for indoctrination."

I intended to ask her why it was necessary to change clothes, but before I could speak she turned and strode away down the passage. After a moment I went into the alcove. It was about as large as a closet, and softly lighted. The only furniture was an oak bench before a mirrored oak dressing table.

The costume I was required to wear lay neatly arranged upon the bench. It consisted of a severely simple toga-like garment that fell a short distance below the knees, a pair of sandals, and a length of braided cord, obviously meant to be tied about the waist.

Disgust and a mounting rebellion rose within me as I examined the articles. I felt like a fool just from looking at them. Actually wearing them, I knew, would be a thousand times more humiliating.

THEN I remembered that personal feelings were unimportant. I had a job to do, and wearing that silly costume was part of the job. I stripped down to my shorts and wrapped the toga around me. I had a nasty time getting it adjusted the way it was meant to be worn, but finally I had it on more or less according to specifications. I tied the cord around my waist and strapped the sandals on my feet. Ex-

cept for one little precaution, I was ready to be indoctrinated.

I removed certain identifying items from my wallet and slipped them into one of my shoes. There was an excellent chance that my clothes would be searched—the change of clothing might have been a trick to provide for that. But it wasn't likely that anyone would examine my shoes. Thus Edward Harnes, special investigator, would have a chance to do a little investigating.

I left the alcove and went to the fountain, as the handmaiden had directed me. Two women stood there, talking in low tones. One was Althea Armora, dressed now in sandals and a simple white gown. She looked temptingly pagan, a vestal of ancient Greece come to life.

The other woman was tall and queenly, with a lush, superb figure and a wealth of Titian hair. Her skin was the sort of skin that often goes with such hair, startlingly white and smooth and flawless. Her features were handsome in a classical way without being actually beautiful. But she exuded an almost overpowering femininity, which more than made up for any lack of superficial attractiveness. She seemed to embody all the qualities that men have found appealing in women since creation's dawn—the firm freshness of youth, combined with the rich fullness of maturity. And there was every reason to suspect that a keen mind accompanied her other charms. Her forehead was high and wide, her long-lashed gray eyes alert and observing. She would not be easy to take advantage of—if it could be done at all.

Althea Armora and the queenly woman stopped talking immediately as they noticed my appearance. From the abrupt way they did so, I guessed they had been discussing me. And evidently

the discussion had been favorable, for the queenly woman's glance at me was smilingly interested rather than suspicious or hostile.

Althea hastened to introduce me. I learned that the queenly woman was Juno, the high priestess of the fountain. It was the custom within the Eyrie, it seemed, to use names from Greek mythology rather than real ones. I had already noted the wearing of classical style garments. All this had the earmarks of one of those phony cults which front for a money-milking racket. Judging from the type of guests I had seen at the Eyrie, it appeared that money figured prominently in this case. But whether the cult being run here was entirely phony remained to be seen.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," Juno told me. "Althea has often spoken of you, and I had been hoping that you would visit the Eyrie."

II NODDED, forcing to my lips what I hoped was an engaging smile. Somehow I couldn't find anything to say. At close range, Juno was quite breathtaking. The woman-force she exuded was compelling and magnetic. She wore only a robe of sheer black silk, beneath which the opaline outlines of her magnificent figure were mistily visible. I found that it required a genuine effort to keep my eyes where they belonged.

I noticed, however, and not without embarrassment, considering the costume I wore, that Juno's own glance was taking stock of me. What she saw apparently did not displease her. Her red lips curved in a slow, faint smile, and her long lashes dropped in a kind of slumbersome contemplation. After another moment she said:

"No doubt you are completely in the

dark about what goes on here, in the Eyrie."

"I certainly am," I said. "Especially about this indoctrination business. Althea kept insisting that she wasn't able to tell me anything."

"You would not have understood. The path to the Eyrie is one to be taken by instinct rather than knowledge. Wonderful things await the persons who take that path. But one must first undergo immersion in the fountain before the door to those things can be opened. Among us, this is known as being indoctrinated."

"It's a sort of initiation?" I asked.

"It is much more than that," Juno told me.

"But the whole thing will be explained to me afterward?"

"Yes, though there will be little need for that. After being indoctrinated, you will understand many things."

I glanced at Althea, who smiled reassuringly at me. "There's nothing to worry about, Edward," she said. "Once you have been indoctrinated, you will actually be a much happier person. Your whole outlook will change."

Considering what Nancy O'Connor had told me about the indoctrination process making a zombie out of one, this seemed nothing more than an outright lie. It meant that Althea Armora was deeply involved in whatever it was that went on within the Eyrie. The part she played was obvious enough—to lure apparently wealthy victims like myself into the Eyrie. As a guest of the Cambertons, of course, it had been presumed that I was wealthy.

There was an element of danger in that. If it was learned that my bank account was a quite insignificant one, strong suspicions regarding me would immediately be aroused. This might easily lead to the discovery of my real identity.

Aware that Althea Armora and the woman who called herself Juno were both watching me intently, I smiled and shrugged. "All this is rather mysterious, so I hope my caution is natural. But I'm very much interested, or I wouldn't be here in the first place."

Juno seemed to relax. "Very well. We will begin your indoctrination at once." She turned to Althea Armora. "You may leave us, Althea."

Hesitating, Althea said, "But the matter we were discussing?"

"Rest assured that you will be suitably rewarded," Juno answered.

A DEEP, secret delight suffused Althea's features. Inclining her head, she turned and hurried from the room.

The little by-play had not been lost on me. Althea expected a reward for something—quite possibly for having brought me, an ostensibly wealthy person, to the Eyrie. I wondered what that reward was. It couldn't have been money, for the Armora family had plenty of that.

Juno was smiling at me. "Are you ready, Edward Harnes?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then step into the fountain. Fear nothing. Relax. Cast yourself loose from the bonds of self. Give yourself entirely to the forces which you will receive."

I went over to the edge of the marble bowl and looked into it. The floor was quite flat. Set into it, in a pattern of concentric circles, were innumerable metal-lined openings, flush with the floor. The thin spray which rose within the bowl came from an opening directly in the center.

The edge of the bowl wasn't high. I stepped over easily and took up a position near the center. There was a stifled, drumming sensation in my chest. The palms of my hands were moist with

perspiration. I thought desperately of the pill Nancy O'Connor had given me. Suppose it had no effect? Suppose the forces of the fountain overpowered me?

Juno was standing with raised arms, her face tilted upward, her eyes closed. She began a ringing, rhythmic chant that echoed dramatically through the shadowed confines of the chamber.

Faster grew the chant, and faster. And as it did so the jet of force in the center of the fountain, near me, began to rise, while from the other openings in the floor additional jets appeared, rising also. Soon they were well over a dozen feet high, enclosing me like a glowing veil of prismatic mist.

The force . . . went through me. It penetrated my body as easily as a current of electricity might have done. But it was not painful. On the contrary, it was delightfully pleasant. It filled me with a kind of rapture that seemed to soothe and lull, gently yet insistently blanketing my mind with a dream-like torpor.

Somehow—I realized that there was danger in this. Somehow I sensed that the blissful lassitude in which I was enfolded was meant to engulf and overpower me, wrest from me all conscious control. But something within me resisted. I think it was this that made me understand what was taking place.

The prismatic streamers towered up around me, glowing vividly, pulsing in a kaleidoscopic change and interplay of hues. I seemed to be floating, rocking gently, in a soft, deep rainbow-colored sea. Warm waves of utter bliss flooded through me, seeking to overwhelm my mind into a state of selfless, unthinking contentment. But within me something fought.

And won.

I DON'T know how long my immersion lasted. In that dream-like con-

dition I'd had no awareness of the passing of time. Scant seconds might have elapsed—or hours. But presently I heard Juno's voice again, calling to me.

"Edward Harnes! Step from the fountain."

Full awareness returned to me. I felt curiously refreshed and strengthened. Every cell of my body seemed filled with a new energy. Even my mind seemed more clear and alert. And in this new alertness Nancy O'Connor's warning returned with sudden vividness. The immersion in the fountain had been meant to subdue my will—to make a zombie out of me. But instead I had drawn strength and vitality from it. I would therefore have to pretend that I had been overcome according to plan. My acting would have to be good—Juno was no fool.

I stepped slowly from the fountain. Juno was watching me narrowly. I came to a stop before her, blinking in a vague, uncertain way. She said:

"How do you feel?"

I frowned in an apparently clumsy effort at thought. At last I said, "I feel . . . different."

Juno watched me a moment longer. She nodded in obvious satisfaction. "Edward Harnes, you must now listen to me carefully. You are a changed person. You must understand and accept that. Do you hear?"

"I am a changed person," I said.

"In recognition of this change you are going to be given a new name. This name is Danaus. As Danaus you will be known among us here, in the Eyrie."

"Danaus," I said. I shook my head slightly and passed the back of my hand across my eyes.

JUNO smiled thinly at that. "The cloudiness will pass away soon," she said. "It will leave you unchanged, except that you will be . . . well,

more receptive to suggestion. In this state of mind you will be able to accomplish wonderful things. You will be able, for example, to change yourself—to become, mentally or physically, the kind of person you have always wanted to be. The desire becomes so intense that it is actually able to bring about a change in the body or brain. This is the old idea of mind over matter raised to the nth degree.

"That there is much truth in this idea has long been known. People have been killed by the power of suggestion. And by it the crippled have been made to walk again, the blind to see. The energy of the fountain increases this power many times, but numerous treatments are necessary before the changes brought about are made permanent. Now that you have been indoctrinated, you will no doubt wish to continue the treatments."

"Yes," I said.

"They are expensive," Juno said. "However, I am sure that you regard the amount of money involved as being an unimportant item. We will discuss it later."

"Yes," I said again. And again I thought of my insignificant bank account. I tried not to look as worried as I felt. If I were to be able to finish my job at the Eyrie and emerge with a reasonable facsimile of a whole skin, money matters were something I had to avoid.

If I were worried about money matters, Juno seemed to have forgotten them. Her slumbersome gaze was taking inventory of me again. She smiled slowly and touched her Titian curls with a shapely hand. She asked:

"Do you find me attractive, Danaus?"

"Very attractive," I answered dutifully.

"Hold me, then," she said. "And

kiss me."

I was supposed to be a sort of zombie. Zombies don't argue when given orders. I stepped closer to her, took her in my arms, and followed through with such enthusiasm as I was able to summon.

This proved to be considerable. She was an attractive woman. Her lips were soft and perfumed, her back smooth and supple. My kiss developed a lot more vigor than I had originally intended.

I didn't know there was anyone behind me until a hand grasped my shoulder and forced me around. I found myself looking at a magnificent throat. Though well over six feet, I had to arch my neck to see the head above the throat. The head was magnificent, too, the features classically chiseled, the hair golden and crisp-curling.

He also had a magnificent fist. But I didn't notice that until it came into violent contact with my jaw.

The chamber turned a somersault. Rockets exploding in my head, I hit the floor, skidded, and crashed into the base of the fountain with a force that numbed my shoulder.

CHAPTER III

I LAY there for a while, waiting for the pieces of me to settle down again and slowly digesting what had happened. As though from a distance, I heard voices—a man's voice and a woman's voice, both swift and sharp with anger.

"You fool!" The woman's voice. "Why did you have to hit him?"

"He had no business kissing you." The man's voice.

"How do you know? It was part of his indoctrination treatment. I wanted to see how far his will power had been overcome."

The man gave a jeering laugh. "As though his will power had to be overcome before you could get him to kiss you! You're not fooling anyone. And I tell you, I won't stand for this sort of thing."

"Your narrow-minded jealousy makes me sick! I'm in charge of things at this end, and I'll do as I please. Don't forget that the Eyrie was my idea. If it wasn't for me, you'd never have gotten anywhere with the fountain—or anything else, for that matter. You'd still be running fetch for old O'Connor. It took me to see the possibilities in the fountain and work out a plan."

"Oh, yes? Well, don't you forget that I'm the only one beside O'Connor who knows how to operate the fountain. Without me, you'd be right back where you started from."

"Then let's keep the whole thing on a business basis. Don't try to run my personal affairs, and I won't try to run yours."

The big fellow seemed to be getting the worst of the argument. And he didn't like it. I had an eye open, by this time, and was watching him. His great fists were clenched. His chiseled lips were a thin line.

He was not quite seven feet tall and probably not as wide as a good-sized door. He was perfectly muscled and proportioned, like a carving in flesh executed by a master sculptor—a sculptor of ancient Greece, perhaps, depicting one of the Olympian gods. He had the same classical quality of appearance I had already noticed in Juno, and it struck me that this was more than coincidence. There was some sort of symbolism involved, some sort of purpose or design.

I didn't try to figure it out. I had become fully aware of the pain in my shoulder and jaw. It rose in me—and

touched something off in my brain. Suddenly I wanted to get up and hit the big fellow. More than that, I wanted to take him in my hands and try to tear him in two like a telephone book.

But I didn't do that. I don't know if I could have done it. I remembered that I was supposed to be the equivalent of a zombie. Zombies are sensible people in an unthinking sort of way. When knocked into a corner, they remain there until further orders.

I remained quiet and watched from under an eyelid. The Magnificent Specimen calmed down. He spread his hands in a conciliatory gesture.

"Now listen, Laverne, be reasonable. We've got to stick together. We aren't going to get anywhere by running off in opposite directions."

"You're the one who should be reasonable," Juno—or Laverne, which seemed her real name—snapped. "You've been throwing your muscles around ever since you got them. The cave man stuff may have been interesting to start with, but I'm tired of it." She waved a hand in dismissal. "Now get out of here, Walt. I've got to clean up the mess you made before someone sees it and starts talking."

"I'll get out," the other said grimly. "But I'm not through with this yet." He turned sharply and stalked away.

I closed my eye quickly as Juno came over to where I lay. She touched my face.

"Danaus! Can you hear me? Are you hurt?"

I ACTED like a man returning slowly to consciousness. I groaned a little and fingered my jaw.

"How do you feel?" Juno asked. She seemed genuinely anxious.

"Shaken up," I said. "And bruised. What happened?"

"You accidentally slipped and hit your

head on the rim of the fountain. That's all. You don't remember anything else. Do you understand?"

I nodded. "I slipped." The words were ironic, but Juno didn't seem to notice. She probably thought my tone was due to my befuddled state of mind.

She helped me to my feet and led me through the narrow doorway behind the tapestry at the rear of the fountain. We came to a small room at the end of the corridor, which was exquisitely decorated in a feminine style. There was a deep white rug on the floor, the walls were a soft shade of gray, and the hangings and upholstery were done in ashes of rose.

Leaving me on a cushioned chaise longue, Juno left for a moment. She returned shortly with a tray on which were numerous objects. With these she bathed the bruise and then covered it so that it wouldn't be noticeable to casual scrutiny.

"There!" she said at last. She surveyed me a moment and patted my cheek. "You're nice," she added. And she kissed me.

One of the handmaidens entered shortly afterward, and Juno left me, murmuring something about there being little time. It seemed that preparations for some sort of ritual were in progress.

I was turned over to the handmaiden, who led me back to the chamber of the fountain and from there to one of the huge, luxurious rooms I had noticed while with Nancy O'Connor. Many more people were present now than when I had first entered the Eyrie. All were dressed in the classical costume affected there—the men in togas like that worn by myself, the women in simple, sleeveless robes. I recognized numerous persons whom I had met during my association with the fashionable society circles of Malvern. They

greeted me as though there were nothing at all out of the ordinary regarding our present surroundings.

The room was filled with an excited habble of talk. Everyone seemed greatly excited by something that was to take place soon. I heard frequent references to the ritual which had been hinted at by Juno. Liquid refreshment was flowing freely—quite a number of the guests were already well primed—and the air was filled with a blue haze of tobacco smoke.

I found myself with a tall glass in my hand, feeling uneasy and out of place. I thought of Nancy O'Connor, wishing suddenly that she were with me. But it was Althea Armora who presently appeared at my side.

She gave me a searching glance. "You seem to have come through in good shape," she said. "How do you feel?"

"Sort of mixed up," I said. "And different, somehow."

"You'll get over it. The first treatments affect a person like that. When the changes finally set in, though, you'll be almost completely normal."

"Changes?" I shook my head slowly, dazed to all outward appearances, yet somehow still retaining enough self-possession to be puzzled. "Juno mentioned changes, too, but I don't understand. I don't see why I should be changed."

"Everyone wants to be changed, even though they aren't aware of it consciously," Althea told me. "Nobody is ever completely satisfied with himself. That's the beauty of the idea behind the fountain. Its field of application is practically unlimited."

"Weren't you satisfied with yourself, Althea?"

memories. "I wasn't always as attractive as I am now. I . . . I hated it. I had money and an aristocratic background, but I didn't have beauty. The fountain changed me."

"Didn't anyone notice, or think it was unusual?"

"In a way. But the changes are slow and gradual, spread over a period of time. Thus, they aren't so startling and evident as if they took place all at once!"

"It's hard to believe," I said. "Why, it's like magic!"

Althea nodded solemnly. "I think it is magic."

"You must be deeply interested in all this," I went on, acting as though it were difficult to express my thoughts clearly. "I mean, you seem to want something more than a change in appearance."

"I want permanence," she explained. She seemed too distracted by the pretense I was going through to notice that my questions were more direct and to the point than was natural under the circumstances. Or perhaps she thought that, in my dazed state of mind, it made little difference how much she revealed to me. "You see, it requires continuous treatments to keep the changes in effect. As long as these treatments are necessary, one remains . . . well, a sort of slave. Will power is submerged. To win freedom in both ways, one has to undergo a certain, special type of treatment. But this is obtained only after a period of service. I have filled this period of service and am now eligible for the special treatment that will make my changes permanent and at the same time give me complete freedom of will."

I knew what that period of service was—to bring to the Eyrie financially well-padded individuals such as I was pretending to be. And Althea's mo-

SHE shook her head, her dark eyes clouding as though with unpleasant

tives for doing so were now clear.

Her explanation had helped to round out the picture that was growing in my mind. Wealthy persons, bored with ordinary, conventional pleasures, were lured to the Eyrie by the promise of unusual and exotic entertainment. They were indoctrinated, their will power submerged. Then they were separated from as much money as could be obtained without attracting attention or risking investigation by authorities. Even then they had to serve in one humiliating capacity or another to win complete stability and self-will.

There was danger in this. Only persons with the highest minds and ideals could have held such power over others without being swept away by it. And I didn't think there were such persons in the Eyrie. Juno and the Magnificent Specimen she had called Walt were quite definitely of ordinary moral calibre. Less than that, perhaps, for the activities they were carrying on at the Eyrie verged on the criminal.

All that seemed clear enough. I wondered about the force fountain. What was the nature of it? Did it actually change people into what they wanted to be? The answer seemed to be in the affirmative. I recalled what Althea had told me only moments ago about her own appearance having been improved. And there was the curious remark Juno had made about Walt throwing his muscles around "ever since he got them"—Walt, who had also "run fetch" for Galvin O'Connor.

This was a definite link to the missing scientist. As a scientist, O'Connor had evidently invented the fountain. And—Juno—or Laverne—and Walt had known him, had been associated with him in some capacity. What had become of him? Was he still . . . alive?

Althea touched my arm. "Edward—are you all right?"

"I'm all right," I said.

"You looked so grim. I—" She broke off as the throbbing note of a deep-toned bell vibrated through the Eyrie. "That is the summons to the ritual," she said. "It is about to begin."

THE people gathered in the room with us swept in an eager rush toward the door. Althea and I followed. The procession took us to the chamber of the fountain, which was now quite dark, the light from the lead-paned windows having faded with the approach of night. A thin plume of glowing spray in the fountain provided what little illumination there was. The temple-like atmosphere of the place, which I had earlier noted, seemed more pronounced.

The others took up a kneeling position on the floor, and Althea and I did likewise. Silence descended as the whispering of excited voices and the rustling of movement stilled. There was only the faint humming of the fountain in the darkness.

A tension gripped me that had in it something almost of awe. I waited impatiently for what was to take place. I didn't have to wait long.

From somewhere, from everywhere, very near, yet as though from far away, came soft music, solemn and slow. It rose in volume, flooding the chamber with rich melody. And as it rose, the spray within the fountain rose, the other jets ascending also, their combined multi-colored glow illuminating the darkness of the chamber.

I became aware of figures standing on the dais, behind the fountain, misty and almost eerie through the still ascending streamers of force. The foremost of the figures was that of Juno. To her right and a few paces in her rear stood the Magnificent Specimen.

On either side of the two, in the hack-ground, was a line of rigid-eyed hand-maidens.

The tableau seemed unreal. The temple-like background of the chamber, the weird fountain, the grouped figures behind it, and the kneeling, silent figures all about me, seemed something out of a curious dream. It was with an effort that I reminded myself that this was all staged, that the minds behind it were quite ordinary, the motives selfish and sordid.

It helped—a little.

The geysering jets of force, pulsing and chromatic, now reached better than half-way up to the arching ceiling of the chamber. The music was deep and full, filling the room with vibrant, rich-toned sound. It reached a crescendo, ending abruptly as Juno lifted her rounded, white arms.

Regal, more than ever queen-like, she strode forward, skirting the fountain, and came to stop at the edge of the dais. Only the Magnificent Specimen followed. The handmaidens remained where they were, gazing fixedly before them.

My own eyes became fixed as they settled on Juno. She wore a sheer white robe that silhouetted her magnificent figure against the brilliant glow of the fountain. On her head was a jeweled tiara or coronet, from beneath which her Titian hair flowed well below the level of her waist. Bracelets glittered at her wrists, and even the sandals that showed below the hem of her robe sparkled with gems.

She spoke in a vibrant voice which carried an undertone of exaltation.

"Proselytes of the fountain, we are gathered here once more to pay homage to that which is the gateway to a new and more perfect life. At this gateway we leave behind ugliness and age, for beyond is beauty and youth. And be-

yond is also the attainment of the individual ideal, for whatever it is that we wish to be, so in all truth, through the aid of the fountain, we may become." Her voice suddenly rang.

"Such is the power of the fountain!"

"Such is the power of the fountain!" the assemblage about me echoed.

"The fountain is beauty!" Juno cried.

"The fountain is beauty!" the response came.

"The fountain is youth!"

"The fountain is youth!"

THERE was a momentary silence. Then Juno spoke again, her tone now sharp and insistent.

"The fountain bestows beauty and youth and whatever else we wish to be—but it must be kept in mind that there is a price. Over and above the monetary contributions that are made so that the power of the fountain might continue and grow, something else is required—something that comes only from the heart. This is three-fold: silence, service, and obedience.

"The fountain demands silence, for there are those in the outside world who will fear its power and seek to destroy it. The fountain demands service, for its power must spread and become a vital force in human affairs. And finally, the fountain demands complete obedience, for otherwise its power will be lost or kept restricted.

"The fountain demands silence!" she cried again, and again the assemblage echoed her.

"The fountain demands service!"

"The fountain demands obedience!"

The words were repeated each time.

Another momentary silence. And then Juno raised her arms in a sweeping gesture.

"Homage!" she cried. "Homage to the fountain!" With her arms still

raised, she turned to face the fountain and began a swift chant. As she did so, the music became audible again, coming from nowhere, yet from everywhere, swifter now, lilting and triumphant. It rose and swelled and grew swifter still. It had a barbaric sort of rhythm that struck to some yet-primitive core of one's being and drew fire from mind and emotions. Despite my instincts to the contrary, I felt my pulses quicken, felt myself jerking in sympathy to the intoxicating tempo.

I realized that the music was calculated to accomplish exactly that. Its effect upon the others, made highly susceptible to suggestion as they were, was as might have been imagined. Most of the people in the chamber were on their feet, bodies swaying and writting, eyes fastened avidly upon the fountain. They seemed more than ever the automata they fundamentally were—puppets moved by invisible strings of pagan music.

Juno finished her chant. Now she turned to the Magnificent Specimen, who had been standing nearby all the while, and moved one arm in a beckoning gesture. He took her hand, and then, stepping together into the bowl of the fountain, they began whirling around and around in a wild dance.

Still higher and faster went the music. A kind of frenzy gripped the gathering. It broke into groups and couples, all stamping and leaping in unrestrained abandon. The whole scene struck me as more than ever unreal. But its utter bizarreness went beyond even a dream-like quality. The possessed creatures whirling and twisting in the changing, polychromatic light of the fountain seemed more like delusions of a drug-crazed mind.

PRESENTLY, I saw that the gathering was moving separately and in

groups toward the fountain. Juno and her companion had left the bowl and now stood to one side. Shoving and jostling in their eagerness, men and women began crowding into the fountain, while those for whom no room was left waited impatiently beyond.

Althea caught my hand. Excitement was dancing in her dark eyes. "Come!" she said. "The fountain!"

I followed unwillingly. I didn't care for the idea of another immersion in the strange, magical force, but I wasn't supposed to have the will power to resist. To have done so would have drawn attention to me.

Althea and I waited our turn, and then we stepped into the bowl. Again I felt the force flow through me, seeking to blanket my mind. And to my dismay I found that my resistance, so effective before, had weakened. The effects of the pill Nancy O'Connor had given me were evidently wearing off. I knew I couldn't remain in the force—and I didn't. I allowed a wildly gyrating couple to separate me from Althea, and then, apparently, to crowd me out of the bowl. In the confusion, my stratagem went unnoticed.

The nightmarish affair didn't last much longer. Soon only a few couples were left in the bowl and the jets of force began to dwindle. The larger part of the gathering was starting to leave the chamber. Althea rejoined me, and we followed. She had grown calm, even bemused. For that matter, a fog seemed to hang over my own mind. The others, however, seemed in high spirits, as though the ritual and immersion in the fountain had intoxicated them.

The exodus from the chamber of the fountain led into a huge room, which was brilliantly lighted. In the middle of it was a great table, laid out as though for a feast or banquet, glittering with china and silver. Amid much

jostling and laughter that seemed more than ever to hold a strange, off-key quality, the members of the Eyrie took their places about the table. Althea led me to a couple of unoccupied chairs, and we sat down. Servants immediately began moving about with trays of drinks.

A short time later, Juno and the Magnificent Specimen appeared, taking their places on a dais at the head of the table. The Magnificent Specimen looked sullen, and Juno's own red lips were a tight line. They appeared to have locked horns again.

I gave Althea a surreptitious nudge with my elbow. "That big fellow sitting next to Juno, who is he?"

"He's second in command here, so to speak," Althea said. "His name is Jove. It's a name he uses at the Eyrie. I don't know the real one. Nor Juno's, for that matter." She shrugged. "It isn't important." Then she peered at me with thoughtfully narrowed eyes. "You've been asking a lot of questions, Edward—too many questions for a man who has been indoctrinated."

I brushed a hand over my forehead. "All this is new to me . . . and confusing. I'm trying to get it straight in my mind. But . . . but somehow it's hard to think."

"Don't try," Althea said. "Our chief duty here is obedience. Remember that, Edward." She sipped from her glass, evidently having dismissed the incident.

I RELAXED slowly. It had been a close shave. Althea was deeply enmeshed with what went on at the Eyrie—more, she seemed fanatically loyal. If I fell under her suspicion, she would not hesitate to denounce me.

Thinking of Althea's subservience to the designs of the pair who called themselves Juno and Jove, I realized sudden-

ly the purpose of the ritual I had witnessed. The idea behind it was to keep the members of the Eyrie in line. Highly receptive to suggestion, they would obey blindly the admonitions contained in Juno's speech: *silence . . . service . . . obedience*. Especially would they obey after they had themselves driven the instructions deeper into their minds by repeating Juno's chant.

The whole thing was clever—diabolically clever. My respect for Juno grew. Food was brought in, but not much eating was done. There was a continuous rush for drinks. The party gradually degenerated into a drunken orgy.

"I'm tired," I told Althea at last, making another befuddled gesture over my face. "And I don't feel exactly well. I'd like to leave."

Althea shook her head quickly. "It isn't a good idea for those who have just been indoctrinated to leave too soon. You'll spend the night here, Edward. I'll notify the Camberton's. It will be perfectly all right, so you need not worry."

She rose and went over to Juno, speaking briefly. Juno nodded and glanced at me with a kind of hidden smile.

A few minutes later, a manservant appeared and led me from the room. He was a hard-featured customer, though well-mannered enough. He left me in a large and attractively furnished bedroom on an upper floor, after making the sort of little, fussy preparations a good servant usually makes. I tried to see if he had a gun under his arm, but didn't get anywhere with it.

My clothing, which I had left in the small dressing room off the chamber of the fountain, was folded neatly over a chair near the bed. My stay at the Eyrie had clearly been anticipated by others than Althea.

Sight of the clothing made me think of my special investigator's credentials, which I had hidden in one of my shoes. The shoes were under the chair. I went over to them and picked up the one I had used as a hiding place. I pulled out the socks I had stuffed inside to keep the credentials from falling out.

They were gone.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the sick feeling left me and I could think and move again, I put the shoe down. Someone hadn't overlooked any bets. My clothes had been gone through with painstaking care. Or maybe there had been a peephole in the dressing room, and my concealing of the credentials had been seen.

It didn't matter. The things were gone. It would not be known to those who were in a position to do something drastic about it that Edward Harnes was not a rich young fellow looking for exotic thrills, but an investigator from the state's attorney's office.

The Eyrie was thus no longer a place to linger in.

I went over to the door and took hold of the knob as though it were made out of bubble gum. I turned it slowly and then tried to pull the door open a crack to see if one of the hard-faced manservants had been left on guard in the hall. I didn't get to find out. The door refused to budge.

That left the windows. There were two of them in the room, each narrow and lead-paned and hung with drapes. They opened in the middle, dividing into two separate vertical sections. I opened the nearest and looked out.

It was quite a drop to the ground. At that, I could have made it—if it wouldn't have been necessary for me to use my legs afterward.

I was still looking out of the window

and toying seriously with the idea of tying strips of torn bedsheets, when I saw a match flare below me and several yards to one side of the building. The match was applied to the end of a cigarette. A man was smoking the cigarette, dim and almost lost in the gloom, and he held a long, dully gleaming object that could only have been a rifle.

That was that. I went over to the bed and sat down and waited.

I didn't have long to wait. About a quarter of an hour later the door clicked open. Two of the hard-faced manservants entered, the guns in their hands serving notice that they had put away their nice manners for the night. After them came Jove, and after him, Juno.

I looked at the Magnificent Specimen to see if he was carrying some lightning bolts or maybe just an ordinary gun, but he was without either. Most likely he thought his muscles were enough. He only held my credentials. He was tapping them on the thumbnail of his other hand and looking at me in a way that indicated the state's attorney's office had lost an investigator.

Juno looked equally grim. She wore a long crimson cloak, folded primly about her. What she was putting on view this time was meant to be strictly business.

"We found something that seems to belong to you," Jove said. He tossed the credentials on the bed near me. He watched my face. So did Juno and the two strongarm boys.

I blinked at the credentials and passed the back of my hand over my forehead. I nodded in an absent sort of way. "Why, yes, they seem to be mine. I . . . I think I remember, now."

Jove smiled thinly. "You can stop acting, Harnes. Juno and I talked to

Althea Armora before we came here, and she told us you had been asking some pretty sharp questions. The only explanation is that your indoctrination treatment didn't affect you for some reason."

Juno stepped forward. "Let me handle the rest of this, Walt." She turned to me and said, "I don't understand what this is all about. You seem to be an investigator from the state's attorney's office, but I can't see why the state's attorney should be interested in what we're doing here."

I said, "Does my being an investigator necessarily mean that the state's attorney is interested in you?"

JUNO moved her shoulders in what might have been a shrug. "The two usually go together, don't they? Or perhaps you have some other explanation."

"I have," I said. "You see, I'm on vacation. Bill Camberton and I had been friends in the army, and he invited me to stay at his place. Naturally, I was presumed to be a fellow with a big bank account. I didn't try to correct the impression. Why should I? It was my vacation, and I was having fun."

"That doesn't explain why you went through the trouble of hiding the things identifying you," Juno said.

"I didn't want you people to get the wrong idea about me. The fact that I'm an investigator might have made it look like I was on the job—as it seems to have done."

"But you seemed to expect that your clothing would be searched."

"The Eyrie seemed to be a hush-hush sort of place. I thought that precautions would be taken regarding new arrivals. And considering the sort of job I have, I didn't want to create any misunderstandings. That's all there is

to it."

Juno moved her shoulders again. "Perhaps. The fact remains that you are an investigator. You may have gained a mistaken impression about certain things that you . . . well, might pass on to your superiors."

I grinned a wide, bright grin that took more effort than appeared on the surface. "This is my vacation, remember. If you insist on thinking that investigators are little tattle-tales who make a habit of reporting everything they see off the job, you have another think due you. We're like everybody else. We do what we get paid for. We don't care what goes on outside business hours."

"That's nice to listen to," Jove put in abruptly. His voice had a cold, impatient tone. "But don't think you have us eating out of your hand just yet. There's one angle about all this that has been overlooked so far. What I want to know is, how does it happen that your indoctrination treatment didn't affect you?"

"How should I know?" I demanded. "Maybe the indoctrination treatment doesn't affect everybody."

"It does," Jove said, grimly positive. "I know what the fountain does and how it does it, and I know what I'm talking about. The only reason why you weren't affected by the fountain can be that you knew beforehand what it did, and came prepared for it. That means you're here on business. And that means somebody set you on us. Somebody who knows about the fountain and what it does."

"Walt!" Juno said abruptly. "You may be wrong about all this. Don't—"

"I know what I'm doing!" Jove snapped. He returned his attention to me. "I'm positive that somebody set you on us. I want to know who that person is."

I shook my head gravely. "I assure you I don't know what you're talking about."

"You aren't fooling me, Harnes. Who is the person who set you on us? It's a girl, isn't it?"

"This is all a mystery to me. I don't understand—"

JOVE moved very suddenly and there was a loud clap of sound. The room tilted and my head seemed to go numb.

"A girl set you on us, isn't that right, Harnes?"

"Walt!" Juno said. She took hold of his arm and tried to pull him away. He moved his muscles briefly, and she staggered back against the bed as though a bulldozer had shoved her.

"I don't know what—" I began.

The clap of sound again and the room tilting even more than before and my head going number than ever.

"A girl set you on us, Harnes. Admit it, damn you!"

I kept my mouth shut this time. I don't know if I could have made any sounds with it. It didn't seem to be my mouth.

"Admit it, Harnes!"

The room was back to normal. Jove was bending toward me, his classically handsome face pushed close to mine. He looked mean and determined, and suddenly I wanted to co-operate with him. I did.

I took my right hand off the bed, where I had been keeping it to prop me up, and I halled it into a fist and swung it at that classically handsome, mean and determined face, with everything I had.

The face looked surprised in a remote sort of way. He tried to straighten up, didn't quite make it, and sat heavily on the floor. Then he slumped over on his side and didn't

have any more questions to ask.

"You . . . you shouldn't have done that!" Juno said. She looked frightened, but somehow, at the same time, her eyes were shining.

"Smart guy, huh?" one of the strongarm boys said abruptly. He evidently had awakened to the fact that he was a strongarm boy and that he had a friend and that they held guns. He turned to Juno. "Leave us work this smart guy over, Boss. He asked for it. We'll fix him good."

"Yeah!" the other put in with a kind of ghoulisn eagerness. "We'll kinda give him a face-lifting treatment." He shifted his gun to his other hand and stuck the hand into the side pocket of his fish-tail coat. It came out with a set of brass knuckles.

"No," Juno said abruptly, firmly. "That won't help matters any. The situation is bad enough without making it worse. Now clear out of here—and take Walt with you. I want to talk to Harnes, alone."

The two protested.

"But, Boss, you can't take any chances with this mug!"

"That's right! No telling what he'll do."

Juno gestured impatiently. "I'm sure he'll be reasonable. He wouldn't be able to get out of the Eyrie even if he did take advantage of me. Now, do as I say."

RELUCTANTLY, the two pocketed their guns and carried Jove from the room. They made quite a job of it, grunting and straining.

Juno waited until the door closed, then sat down on the bed beside me. She looked worried and miserable. How much of it was real and how much an act was difficult to say.

"I wish this hadn't happened," she said. "I hate unpleasantness of any

kind. But in a way, I'm glad about what you did to Walt. He had it coming to him. He's been acting high and mighty ever since he . . . well, he wasn't always the way he is now. It sort of went to his head."

I nodded and rubbed my knuckles. They felt as if a sledgehammer had massaged them.

Juno noticed what I was doing and appeared instantly concerned. "Did you hurt your hand? I'm so sorry."

"It isn't bad," I said.

She took the band and patted it tenderly. "I like you, Edward. In fact, I like you a lot. You're nice . . . an intelligent, upstanding sort of person. You know, I could use a man like you here."

"What about Walt?" I asked. "He'd object to that—to put it mildly."

"Walt could be taken care of."

"How do you mean?"

She shrugged and smiled and squeezed my hand a little. "There are ways, Edward. Don't worry about it. You'd take Walt's place, of course."

"That wouldn't be hard to do," I said thoughtfully. "The Eyrie is quite a place for a man to hang his hat in. And the fountain has possibilities."

"Possibilities!" Juno said. "Edward, you don't know the half of it. The fountain gives us control over the people who come here—people who have so much money they don't know what to do with it. But we do. We suggest things like contributions and endowments, and they're glad to make them. They even insist on it—with a hint or two."

"But money isn't the only angle. The people who come to the Eyrie aren't just wealthy—they're important, too. They know other important people and bring us recruits from among them. And these bring us recruits in turn. There's practically no limit to the process. All

these people have connections of one kind or another with such fields as finance, commerce, industry, and politics. By gaining control over them, we also gain control over those fields. And by controlling those fields—but no doubt you realize the rest of it by now, Edward."

I did. "Good Lord!" I breathed softly.

Juno smiled in a pleased fashion. She evidently thought I was expressing admiration and awe, but the truth is that I was completely appalled. She went on:

"It wouldn't be too difficult to gain control of the entire world. It would take time, but with the fountain constantly renewing and revitalizing us, we could afford that. And we could make it an infinitely better world. We could give everyone youth and beauty. And by having control over them, we could banish power politics and war. We could make everyone work together on a common plan of improvement in every branch of life."

HER gray eyes glowed. "We could be gods—greater than gods, almost! But it would have to be handled in the right way. That's why I'm offering you this chance, Edward. You're intelligent, reasonable. Walt was that way at first, before he let his muscles go to his head." She gave my hand another little squeeze, intimate and confiding. We were old friends, now. There were no secrets between us.

"So you see, Edward, we must let nothing happen to put this wonderful plan of ours in danger. And it is in danger right now. Some person, it seems, was responsible for you being sent to the Eyrie. This person knew what the fountain did, knew how to get around it. We must know who this person is, Edward. We must let no one spoil our

plans at this early stage."

"There isn't anyone like that," I said. "What I told you about being on vacation is the truth."

Juno released my hand as though it had been dead a week and she had just found out about it. She stood up. Her face was a statue's face, hard and cold.

"It seems I must use force to get information out of you. Very well. Whatever you were given to escape the effect of the the fountain can't be permanent. You'll be given another indoctrination treatment later, and this time I have no doubt that it will take effect. You'll tell me what I want to know. After that, you're through. I won't do anything so clumsy as to have you killed. You will simply become a victim of complete amnesia—so complete that none of the available scientific methods will be able to restore your memory. Then you will be released somewhere far away. No suspicions will be attached to the Eyrie, for there will be dozens of wealthy and influential persons to testify that you left here with a perfectly sound mind."

She turned and stalked out and I was left alone with my thoughts. They weren't the kind of thoughts to be alone with.

I didn't want to be alone with them. I went to the door, and it was still locked. I looked out of the window, and the guard outside was still there.

I PACED the floor and tried to get used to being alone with my thoughts. Juno's scheme of using the fountain to gain control of the world appeared utterly fantastic on the surface—even insane. She had evidently let delusions of power go to her head as Walt had let his muscles go to his. But I had the sneaking suspicion that it could be done if banded in the right way. Anything can be done if handled

in the right way.

I had to get out of the Eyrie and tell those who were in a position to do something about it what was going on there and what Juno was planning. But it didn't look as though I would ever get out of the Eyrie in my right mind. Unless. . . .

I thought desperately of Nancy O'Connor—the person whose identity Juno and Walt wanted so badly to know. They would have been surprised almost senseless to learn she was right where they could easily get their hands on her.

If I could somehow get in touch with Nancy O'Connor, she might be able to help me escape. But I couldn't think of any way to get word to her. I didn't even know if she could help me to get away.

My legs began to ache from pacing the floor, and I sat down on the bed again. I must have fallen into a doze. The last thing I remember, I was still trying to think of a way to get in touch with Nancy O'Connor. The next—

I felt somebody shaking my arm gently yet insistently. I climbed up out of the dark well of sleep and opened my eyes. I gasped, stared, then shot bolt upright on the bed.

I was looking at Nancy O'Connor.

CHAPTER V

"WHAT . . . how—" I began.

She motioned for silence. "The guard out in the hall! Drag him in here before someone sees him. I knocked him out. Here—this is his gun."

I looked at the gun and then at Nancy O'Connor and was too astonished to move. She grasped my arm and shook it urgently.

"Hurry! Drag the guard in here. Someone might see him."

Climbing out of my daze with an effort, I went to the door and looked into the hall. The guard was there, all right, slumped to one side in unconsciousness. I gripped him under his armpits and hauled him into the room. He was a big fellow, and I wondered how Nancy had been able to overcome him. I asked her about it.

She closed the door without allowing the lock to catch and grinned briefly. "Simple," she said. "First I used my feminine charms on him to get within range. Then I hit him over the head with this."

For the first time, I became aware of the object she carried as she thrust it under my nose. It was a crude blackjack, made from two stockings which had been placed one within the other and filled with sand or earth.

"I heard talk in the servants' quarters that an investigator from the state's attorney's office had gotten into the Eyrie and had been discovered," she went on. "That meant you, of course. So I spied out the lay of the land, got my blackjack ready, and waited for the proper moment to strike."

"Great going!" I said. "The thing to do now is for us to get away from here. The undercover stuff is over with. Juno and Jove know who I am, and when the guard wakes up, they'll know you're the one who helped me escape."

"The thing to do now," Nancy returned imperturbably, "is to get my father out of the room in the cellar where he's being kept prisoner."

"Your father!" I gasped. "He's here?"

She nodded. "As I just said. I found out about it while everyone was attending the ritual in the chamber of the fountain. I was in a storeroom just off a narrow hall that leads from the cellar to the servants' quarters, when I

heard a couple of men go past. One of them told the other that he was getting tired of carrying food down to that guy in the cellar. The other told him to shut up, because they weren't supposed to talk about it. So I knew I had found out where my father was. He's the only person Juno and Jove would want to keep prisoner."

Her tone grew intense, insistent. "If we're going to escape, we'll have to take my father with us. Otherwise Juno and Jove will move him somewhere else—if they don't actually kill him. They won't take the chance that we'll bring the police and have them arrested for kidnapping."

Nancy was right, but rescuing her father was only going to make our own positions more difficult. I said nothing about that, though. I bent and began to strip the servant's uniform from the unconscious guard. I would need it to get through the Eyrie without raising an alarm.

NANCY turned her back and began to talk softly and swiftly. She seemed to be using words to fight down the anxiety within her.

"You've probably been wondering about my part in all this . . . what I'm doing at the Eyrie, and how I got here in the first place. It all starts with my father. I hadn't had any word from him for a long time and grew worried. I went out to the place in the country where he had his laboratory, and found that he was gone. I had been living and working in the city, you see. Father had always been buried in his experiments, and we had gone our separate ways ever since I was old enough to stand on my own feet. I actually hadn't been out to his laboratory in years. He preferred it that way, as my visits would only have interrupted him in the middle of some important line of

work. But we saw each other frequently enough. Father often came to the city to buy supplies, or to keep appointments concerning the legal and commercial ends of his inventions."

She paused, and I murmured something or other to assure her that I was interested and listening. I had the guard stripped by now and was starting to climb into his clothes.

"The strangest thing about father being gone," Nancy went on, "was that his laboratory assistant and housekeeper were gone, too. He had often mentioned them, but I had never met them, of course. From father's descriptions of them, the laboratory assistant seems to have been a small, thin man with a pale, bony face, and the housekeeper a fat, middle-aged woman, who hadn't been attractive enough to get married. This woman, oddly enough, thought she was a reincarnation of Juno, an ancient Greek goddess. She read Greek mythology and surrounded herself with classical objects as though it were a sort of religion."

"Why, say!" I gasped. "That must be—"

"I'm coming to that," Nancy broke in quickly. "I felt completely lost at first. With everyone having so mysteriously vanished, there seemed no way I could learn what had happened. Then I remembered something. Ever since I was a little girl, father had kept a sort of diary or journal. I was the only one beside him who knew about it. He never mentioned it to others, and even went so far as to keep it hidden in a concealed drawer of his desk.

"The diary was still there when I looked for it. Father had made entries in it up to the very day he disappeared, and those for the last several months explained what I wanted to know. . . . It seems father had accidentally stumbled upon an important discovery, a

completely new kind of force. He didn't know what it was, but he had found what it could do. This force made it possible for the mind to influence the body in such a direct and powerful way that, after repeated exposure to the force, the shape of the body could actually be changed. A little later, father found that even a certain amount of youth could be regained.

"But there was a strange drawback. The force made the mind highly receptive to suggestion. This was dangerous, since helpless slaves could be made of people. After a large number of experiments, however, father found that such stimulants as caffeine and benzedrine helped in restoring self-will to a subject who had undergone repeated exposure to the force. Finally, he settled on a benzedrine derivative that was completely effective. . . . This is what I gave you, Edward Harnes. The formula, of course, was in my father's diary."

"Your father," I said, "experimented on his laboratory assistant and housekeeper."

"Yes," Nancy said. "Their names were Walt and Laverne. Father described how they had been changed, and from this description I set out to find them. It wasn't difficult. They're a distinctive couple now, you know, the sort people notice and remember. I traced them to Malvern, and from there to the Eyrie.

"Getting a job here wasn't hard to do. I worked a short time for a Malvern family, and another servant there recruited me for a job in the Eyrie—just as Althea Armora recruited you. Walt and Laverne had never seen me, so I felt safe enough. I found that servants here were indoctrinated, so that they wouldn't be too curious about what went on, or leave and spread information about what they saw. But I

had the counteractive drug ready. And I had already written the letter to the state's attorney and left it with a friend. I knew help would come sooner or later."

"You did a wonderful job," I said. "I hope I won't spoil what you started."

I WAS fully dressed now. I had torn my toga into strips and was engaged in tying and gagging the guard. Finished with that, I shoved his gun into a pocket and turned to Nancy.

She had the door open and was peering into the hall. "The coast is clear," she said. "Come on."

We strode out, Nancy in the lead. In the middle of the hall was a stairway that descended to the lower floor. We approached it slowly. Nancy peered over the balustrade a moment, listening. Then she gestured, and we went down like a couple of ghosts who dreaded meeting human beings.

Near the end of the stairs Nancy repeated her precautions. They weren't wasted this time. She stiffened in alarm and drew me back against the wall. After a moment I heard the sound of approaching feet.

It was a manservant. He didn't turn toward the stairs, but went past. He didn't notice us.

I relaxed and took my hand off the butt of the gun in my pocket. The palm was moist.

We resumed our trip. We were in another hall, dimly lighted and silent. Nancy turned in the direction from which the manservant had come. This obviously led to the servants' quarters.

My guess proved to be correct. At the end of the hall we turned into a narrow corridor that led past a series of rooms, strictly utilitarian as compared with the rest of the Eyrie. There was a very large, glittering kitchen, a rather plain dining room, and then a number

of workrooms. Most of the lights were on in the kitchen, and three women were there, talking. I hurried past, giving them time to notice only my uniform.

A moment later I had another reason to be glad I had worn it. I saw Nancy glance behind us and stiffen. A man was coming down the hall in our direction. He evidently had seen us, but our familiar uniforms were reassuring. He turned into a room without any sign of suspicion.

The Eyrie was quite a place. The corridor we were following branched off at right angles into still another.

Nancy glanced at me tensely as she turned into it. "This leads to the cellar," she said.

"Do you think a guard will be on duty where your father is being kept?" I asked.

"I don't know. We'll have to be careful." She stopped at the door of a storeroom, motioning for me to wait. Seconds later she reappeared, a flashlight in her hand. "I had it planted in there," she explained. "I knew we'd need one."

She hurried into the lead again, but this time we didn't have far to go. The corridor ended in a flight of stone steps that went down into heavy darkness.

We went down, the flashlight guiding our way. At the end was a heavy door. It proved to be unlocked. It swung open, with a slight squeaking of hinges, when I tried the knob.

"So far, so good," I whispered to Nancy. "Now, where do we look for your father?"

"I . . . I don't know," she said. "I've never been in the cellar before."

THAT was a problem. Judging from the size of the floor above, the cellar covered a lot of space. It would take time to make a careful search, and

there wasn't much of that left to us. Someone was certain to notice that the guard was no longer on duty at the room where I had been kept. The alarm would be out.

I took the flashlight from Nancy and turned it on the floor. There was a heavy layer of dust, in which footprints became visible when the beam of the flashlight was held at a certain angle. All at once I realized that our problem was solved. I remembered what Nancy had said about the man who had grown tired of carrying food down to that guy in the cellar. The trips would have worn a path through the dust. All we had to do, therefore, was to follow the path. It would take us directly to Galvin O'Connor's prison.

I told Nancy of my discovery, and we started out. The cellar was dark and silent as a tomb. Faint, scurrying noises sounded in heavily shadowed corners, and small eyes glittered wickedly at us. There were long, dark passages and then large, open spaces broken by stone supporting columns, in which piled objects bulked like crouching denizens of some dank and shadowy netherworld.

The trail through the dust finally ended in a passage at a far side of the cellar. It ended at a heavy door, beneath which showed a thin line of light.

Nancy threw herself at the door, rapping at it with frantic eagerness. "Father! Father, are you there?"

There was a squeaking of springs, a muttered exclamation, and then the sound of footsteps. "Nancy?" a muffled voice said. "Nancy, is that you?"

"Yes!" she said. "Yes!"

"Great heavens, child! How in the world did you—"

A heavy thud broke the crypt-like stillness of the cellar.

"You fool!" a distant voice snapped angrily. "Why couldn't you be more

careful?" A momentary pause, then the distant voice came again. "Hurry up now, all of you. If they're down here, we can't let them get away."

It was Walt's voice. The sound of numerous running feet followed it.

CHAPTER VI

NANCY whirled back to me an instant before I switched off the flashlight. "They're coming after us! What are we going to do?"

"Hide," I said. When we had come up the passage, I had noticed several doors ajar along it. I remembered them now. I whispered my plan to Nancy, and she communicated it to her father. Then I took her hand and led her after me, guiding my way by running my free hand along the passage wall.

After a few seconds my hand went into emptiness. I groped and felt the wood surface of a door and pushed it open wider. I drew Nancy in after me, swung the door partially shut, and switched on the flashlight again. We were in a rectangular stone room in which were numerous large boxes and barrels, strewn about and piled haphazardly, and containing, it seemed, excelsior and wadded canvas.

I gestured to Nancy, and we crawled over some of the boxes and squeezed between others, making our way hurriedly toward the rear. As I had hoped, a few of the boxes there were empty. I helped Nancy into one and put a length of canvas over her. This I covered with handfuls of excelsior. Then I crammed myself into another box a short distance away. I had another length of canvas ready and pulled it over me.

I waited. I heard the running footsteps grow louder and then go pounding past. They stopped at the door of Galvin O'Connor's prison.

"The lock hasn't been touched," Walt's voice said. "But they may be down here somewhere. Spread out and search."

Remote, muffled sounds followed. After a while the door of the room hinged open and a couple of men strode in. There were thumping noises as boxes were pushed aside or knocked over.

I stopped breathing. I expected at any moment to have the canvas pulled off me. But nothing happened.

"We're wasting time here," one of the men searching the room said. "You can see all these boxes are filled up."

"Yeah," the other returned. "No-body hiding behind them either. Let's go."

They walked out, and the muffled sounds coming from beyond the room gradually faded away. I kept waiting. My muscles were getting cramped. I had an almost uncontrollable desire to climb out of my biding place and walk around. I began to feel as a man buried alive in a coffin must feel.

AND then footsteps went past the door again. I heard Walt's voice.

"You stay on guard here, Mike. It doesn't look like they're anywhere around, but they might show up and try to release the man we're keeping down here."

"You can trust me, Boss," a heavy voice answered.

"This is all Juno's fault," Walt said again, sudden fury in his tone. "If she hadn't been so chicken-hearted, that snooping investigator wouldn't have been able to get away in the first place. I wanted to work him over without wasting time, but she had her own ideas. Well, I'm through with her ideas. From now on, this place is going to be run the way I think it should be run. I'm taking over as soon as I get enough men to back me."

"I'm with you, Boss," Mike said.

"Good!" Walt again. "Keep your eyes open. Things are going to start popping around here."

I heard a single pair of footsteps go past the door and fade in the distance. Walt had evidently left to start things popping.

Silence closed down once more. I waited a couple of centuries, my cramped muscles screaming louder with each decade that went past. Finally I decided it was time for action.

Slowly, I pushed the canvas off from me. I gripped the sides of the box and as slowly pulled myself erect. It made noise, but not enough for Mike to hear the sound. When my legs grew accustomed to being stood upon once more, I climbed from the box. From there-on it was all slow motion again. I felt my way among the boxes like a deep-sea diver moving through thirty fathoms of gelatin.

I reached the door, found that it had been left open by the two who had searched the room, and peered out. Except for the line of light under the door of Galvin O'Connor's prison, the passage was pitch black. Mike was standing guard in darkness, and I didn't like that. I was wondering what to do about it, when a box crashed to the floor behind me.

For a hung, breathless moment the stillness of the cellar deepened to an impossible degree. Then Mike's flashlight snapped on and centered upon the door and there was the sound of his careful feet approaching along the passage.

I was standing just to one side of the door, very lonely in the beam-pierced gloom. I held the gun Nancy had taken from the guard she had knocked out. My hand ached from the way I held it. But I didn't notice that, then. I was aware only of Mike. Mike and I were

alone in the world.

He reached the door and the beam of his flashlight shot past me and roved over the piled boxes beyond. "I know you're in there," he said. "Come on out!"

He didn't sound as if he were convinced. The room had been searched, the boxes disturbed. One of them might have been pulled out of balance enough to have fallen.

"You heard me," Mike said. "I got a gun. You don't come out, I start shooting." He sounded less convinced than ever. He waited. He muttered something under his breath—and walked through the door.

HE MUST have heard the tiny sound my arm made as it raised the gun, because he whirled. But even as he whirled, I brought the gun down on his head. He swayed erect for a moment, sagging at the knees, and then dropped.

I let my breath out, discovering that I felt oddly tired and drained. I wanted to go someplace where the lights were bright and the music loud and have a couple of beers. But I couldn't do that. All I could do was squat down beside Mike and go through his pockets. If he was the man who usually brought food to Galvin O'Connor, he would be the man most logically to leave on guard. That meant he would have keys to the door of O'Connor's prison.

He did. There was a ring of keys in his coat. I took them, as well as his gun and flashlight, and went back to where I had left Nancy.

She had climbed out of her hiding place. In the process of doing so, she had evidently caused a box to fall. She sighed in utter relief when I identified myself.

"I was positive that we were finished with," she said. She sighed again and

glanced around. "What happened to the man who came in here?"

"He bumped his head on my gun, and it made him tired," I said. "He went to sleep."

"That was nice of him," she said. She swayed, caught my arm, and smiled with an effort. "I don't know if I can take any more of this, but what's next?"

"Next, we make your father a free man again." I dangled the keys before her eyes. "These will save us the trouble of using dynamite to get the door open."

"You're wonderful," she said. "I'd kiss you—if you didn't sound slightly hysterical as it is."

"I don't get a case like this every day . . . or kisses either. Suppose you take a chance on me?"

She smiled slowly and lifted her face and leaned toward me. I was burdened with a gun, a flashlight, and a ring of keys, but it was still quite a kiss. It seemed at the moment to make even our desperate situation worthwhile. Yet, somehow, it left me feeling sad.

We left the room, then, and made our way to the door behind which Nancy's father waited, worried and anxious as might easily be guessed. She spoke reassuringly to him while I tried the keys. Presently I found the one that fitted the lock. The door swung open.

Nancy checked herself in the act of rushing into the room. She stared. ". . . Father?" she said.

I was staring, too.

Galvin O'Connor was a slim, straight man in a much-wrinkled suit. He had a lean, humorously intelligent face, pale from long confinement, and crystal-blue eyes like Nancy's. His brown hair, touched with gold in the light, needed cutting.

I had expected an entirely different sort of person: middle-aged and scholarly, stooped, perhaps, with a lined

face and bespectacled eyes and graying hair. But Galvin O'Connor, to judge from his appearance, was in his late thirties.

He was grinning. "You'll have to get used to me, Nancy. If you know anything about the fountain, then the way I look now is easily explained."

ONLY then did Nancy rouse into motion. She flew into his arms, and he held her tightly, his grin softening. After a moment she turned back to me, and between sniffs and dabs at her moist-eyes, saw that we were properly introduced.

Hasty explanations followed. Nancy gave a quick sketch of how she had traced O'Connor to the Eyrie, finishing with the details of my own presence there. O'Connor then filled in certain gaps regarding himself. Walt and Laverne, it seemed, had decided to steal the force O'Connor had discovered. Or rather Laverne had decided to do so. Hers had been the guiding spirit from the beginning. She had seen in the force an opportunity for power and wealth, and had communicated her ambitions to Walt.

To keep their possession of the force a secret, and to prevent interference by O'Connor, the pair had made him a prisoner. They had hesitated to dispose of him entirely, since they did not understand the force and feared an emergency would arise that only O'Connor could overcome. Forcing O'Connor to work with them, they had started out on a small scale and gradually worked their way up to ownership of the Eyrie. It was O'Connor who had designed the fountain, for only in that way could the force be used most safely upon human beings.

Finally, I told O'Connor of the differences that had arisen between Walt and Laverne, culminating in Walt's decision

to take over control of the Eyrie. I finished, "Unless I'm very much mistaken, there's going to be a lot of fireworks around here. Laverne has men on her side, and she isn't the sort to give up easily. Her fighting with Walt may give us our chance to get away."

O'Connor nodded quietly. "I'm willing to do anything for that chance. You can depend on me."

"Then we'd better get started," I said. "What we have to do is reach the place where the cars are kept and then get through the gate. If there's a man on guard, the uniform I'm wearing should help me get close enough to put him out of action."

I gave O'Connor a gun and flashlight, pausing only long enough to look in on Mike. He was still sleeping. Then I rejoined Nancy and her father in the passage, and we hurried toward the door leading out of the cellar.

I opened the door cautiously and listened. For a moment there was a deep silence. And then the distant sound of scattered shots came from somewhere in the building above. The fireworks, it seemed, had started.

I led the way slowly up the stairs and into the corridor joining the one which led past the servants' quarters. Nobody was in sight. Evidently, those not directly participating in the battle had fled the Eyrie.

"There's a short hall near the kitchen that leads outside," Nancy whispered to me. "It isn't far from here."

I nodded, and we set out for the spot she indicated. We were halfway there when three men with rifles burst from a room ahead and started to cross the corridor. They sighted us at almost the same time that we saw them. They leaped back out of sight, and an instant later I saw their rifles poke around the corners of the doorways within which they had taken cover.

There were no rooms nearby into which we could have gone. We were caught flatfooted. To attempt resistance would have been suicide.

"Drop those guns!" one of the men snapped at us. "Try anything, and we start shooting."

I looked sickly at O'Connor. He gave me a tired sort of smile and tossed his gun to the floor. I let mine follow.

CHAPTER VII

THINGS happened swiftly after that.

The men surrounded us and then shoved us into motion ahead of them. They weren't gentle about it.

From their conversation, I gathered that we were being taken to Walt, this group being part of his faction. The battle was going against Laverne. She was now making a last-ditch stand in the chamber of the fountain. These men had just put out of action those of her followers remaining in other parts of the building.

The sound of shots was louder now and more frequent. To me they sounded like a death-knell. I knew what our fate would be in Walt's hands.

Desperately I tried to think of something that would get us out of the mess—something fast and clever and unexpected, the way such things should be. But I couldn't think of anything. My mind was numb with shock and dread.

Even if I had been able to think of something, I doubt that it would have done any good. The men who had caught us were alert and meant business. They intended to deliver us to Walt, and whether dead or alive obviously made little difference to them.

We were marched out of the servant's quarters and through the hall leading away from it, where we were joined by another group of men. They were exultant. With Walt as their boss, so

their talk ran, big things lay ahead of them. Things like robbery and murder, organized crime on a nation-wide scale. The world was their oyster—and they were going to open it with blackjacks.

We came at last to a room near the ball leading to the chamber of the fountain. The firing I had been hearing for the past few minutes was coming from this hall. Walt's men had a barricade of furniture in the chamber, and were slowly closing in from behind it.

As we were shoved into the room, I saw that Walt was present. He was snapping out orders with a great air of importance. At sight of us his classically handsome features went blank, then slowly formed into a hard smile.

"Well, well!" he said, striding forward. "The snooper! And O'Connor! And little Thetis!" His eyes fixed on the girl. "Your part in this can only have one explanation. Laverne and I should have guessed that Nancy O'Connor might somehow trace us and get into the Eyrie. But that danger has now been nicely taken care of."

He paused to listen as one of the men who had brought us in explained how we had been captured. "So you two were in the cellar after all, eh?" he said, turning to Nancy and me. "And you released O'Connor." His huge hand shot out and fastened on my shirt-front. "What happened to Mike?"

"He tripped on a shoelace," I said, "and knocked himself out."

"I get what you mean," Walt said. His other hand flashed up.

I tried to jerk my head aside, but wasn't quite fast enough. His knuckles bounced off the side of my jaw, and the room tilted crazily. There was something bitterly familiar about it.

WALT swung again, and this time I was slower than ever. A darkness

exploded inside me and stayed there for what seemed a long time.

When I came around again, I found my head pillowed on Nancy's lap. She was sitting on the floor with me over in one corner of the room. Her father was in a chair nearby, his elbows on his knees, staring at the floor. A lumpy-faced man with a gun stood guard over us.

I struggled to sit up, making hard work of it. Nancy watched me anxiously.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"I'm fine," I said. "I'm all ready to go another round. Or I will be when I've slept a week and maybe grown a foot taller and gained fifty pounds."

"You sound hysterical again," Nancy said.

"I fool people that way," I said. "I always sound hysterical when I'm being witty and cute."

I thought of Walt, then, and looked around for him. He wasn't in evidence. Near the front of the room were several men. Two had been wounded, and were being clumsily bandaged. Another man lay stretched out on the floor, quiet and bloody. He was beyond bandages.

The firing was still going on. But it seemed scattered and desultory now, half-hearted. Presently, it stopped altogether.

And then a line of people began filing into the room. First came five men, weary and covered with blood-soaked bandages, their hands in the air. After them came two men with guns. Then came Laverne, her Titian hair disheveled, her face pale and brooding. Her black robe had been torn and was slipping dangerously. After her came Walt, a wolfish grin on his face and a gun in one big hand. Behind him followed several more of his henchmen.

Walt pushed Laverne in our direction. He came to a stop before us, legs

spread, hands on his hips. "Here we all are!" he said cheerfully. "One big happy family." He surveyed us a moment longer, and slowly his features grew cold and bleak. "You're all a bunch of trouble makers. I'm not going to take any more chances with any of you. I'm running things here from now on, and I intend to see that nothing goes wrong. That means you can consider yourselves finished."

"Just what are you going to do with us?" Nancy demanded.

"I have something suitable and effective in mind," Walt said.

"But all of us!" O'Connor said, his lean face twisted in disbelief. "You must be mad to think you can get away with anything like that."

"He is mad," Laverne said, speaking as though to no one in particular. "Too much of the force does that to a person. One comes to believe that he can do anything . . . that he is a law only unto himself. The force is too dangerous for human beings. I've learned that."

"You have a lot more to learn," Walt said with a sneer. "Part of it is that I'm not as mad as you think. You, my dear Laverne, are going to take sick and gradually die. Suggestion by means of the force will do that, as you well know. Harnes is going to become a victim of complete amnesia, which means he will be as good as dead. Influential witnesses will swear that he left here in good health. As for O'Connor and Tbetis—or I should say Nancy O'Connor—and the men who were stupid enough to go against me, all are going to be sunk far out at sea. No one can be certain that O'Connor and the girl were ever here in the first place. The others aren't important enough for anyone to bother about. If the police do ask any questions, just remember that I control the minds of a lot of important

people. I'll just have them wave their money around, and the police will be happy to forget anything desired of them."

WALT rocked back on his heels and grinned. "Any more questions?"

None of us seemed able to think of any.

"Then we'll get started," Walt said. "First O'Connor and the girl and the—" He broke off, listening.

I was listening, too. I think I had been hearing the sound for the past several seconds, but only now did my awareness center fully upon it.

A deep, deep humming throbbed and vibrated throughout the Eyrie.

I felt it through the chair I was sitting in. I felt it far down inside me.

The sound had an electric quality. And somehow it hinted strongly of impending disaster. A vague, instinctive fear shivered through me as I listened.

Laverne laughed. "Do you hear that, Walt? Do you know what it is?"

"The fountain!" he whispered, a dark and terrible dismay creeping over his face.

"The fountain, Walt," Laverne said. "When I saw that the fight was going against me, I went to the control room and made certain adjustments. Then I set the timing device and allowed you and your men to catch me." She laughed again, a harsh and savage laugh. "The force is filling the entire building, Walt—more of it than was ever meant to be used. The Eyrie will crumble to its very foundations. I set the thought in the minds of each of you. And there it will stay and do its work until the force generators shake themselves to pieces. But by that time the Eyrie will be gone!"

There were sudden noises from the men near the front of the room. Several had slipped through the door and

were racing away down the hall. Amid exclamations of fear and panic, the rest followed.

"Come back here, you fools!" Walt shouted. "Come back!"

There was no answer. There was only the force, throbbing and vibrating through blood and bones and stone and wood. There was that and—there was a dull, heavy crashing sound that came from a part of the building very near.

"The Eyrie is starting to go, Walt," Laverne said.

He whirled on her, his eyes wild. "It's all your fault! You've ruined everything! You're destroying all that I might have—" His voice choked. An invisible hand seemed to twist his face into a mask of insensate rage.

He moved—very suddenly. The gun in his hand swept up.

I shouted and started out of my chair—but it was too late.

The gun roared three times, the shots so close together that they sounded almost like one.

L AVERNE stiffened, her arms half raised. With her eyes squeezed tightly shut, she stood swaying.

Another heavy, crashing noise rumbled through the building. Smaller crashes followed it. They seemed to last forever.

Laverne crumpled and fell.

I came all the way out of my chair this time. The chair came with me. A red haze came with me, too. It hung in front of my eyes, making it difficult for me to see Walt. But I could see him. He was all that I wanted to see.

I lifted the chair up and brought it down on Walt's back and head and it went to pieces in my hands. He fell to his knees. The gun dropped several feet away. I wasn't interested in it. The way I felt, my hands would finish what I had started out to do.

Another crash, rumbling and lasting forever.

Walt shook himself and looked at me and there was no sanity in his face anymore. He stood up. He was a big fellow. Getting hit with a chair was a minor inconvenience.

He came at me through the red haze. I heard Nancy scream, but it came from very far away and I was moving, too.

I wasn't Edward Harnes. I was something with claws and teeth and a pelt of shaggy hair.

What happened then isn't clear in my mind. I have only the foggy impression of hitting at Walt and getting hit, of falling down and getting up again, of knocking into walls and furniture. The room went around and around, and Walt appeared and vanished in a distorted, disjointed kind of way.

I fought. I fought with knuckles and elbows, with teeth and fingernails. I fought with my knees and the hard points of my shoes. I used every dirty fighting trick the army had ever taught me. Once in a while I grabbed a piece of furniture, but it never lasted long and ground to splinters in my hand.

The room went around and around. I went down and got up again. And all the time, in the distance, yet all around me, were rumbling crashes that shook the floor. They were almost continuous now. The thought was in our minds, the force flooded the Eyrie—and the Eyrie was crumbling into ruin.

Around and around, and then Walt stopped moving. I couldn't understand it. I wasn't given time to understand. There was a figure on each side of me and they were pulling me along and yelling at me. And at the same time crashing noises rumbled and roared all around me.

I grew used to the idea of running and ran without having to be pulled.

Cold air hit my face. I stumbled through darkness. Not exactly darkness—a gray light was flooding the sky.

I RAN. The two figures beside me ran also. Dark objects swam past . . . walls, a gate, trees, a lot of trees. From behind came a dull crashing and grinding and roaring.

After a while I felt a hand on my arm, drawing me to a stop. I dropped to the ground and put my head in my arms. I heard somebody sobbing for breath. It might have been me. It might have been either of the two people with me.

I wasn't sure of anything for a long time. But finally things steadied inside me, and I was Edward Harnes again. I looked around and saw Nancy and O'Connor. They were gazing back at the Eyrie. I looked, too.

There wasn't anything to see, now. The Eyrie was a great mound of rubble. It had crumbled to brick-sized fragments. It had dissolved room by room and wall by wall. A huge blanket of powder and dust was settling slowly.

"I don't know if any others beside Walt were trapped in the building," I heard O'Connor say. "If so, they're beyond hope. Nobody could possibly have lived through what happened."

"And the fountain is gone," Nancy said.

O'Connor nodded slowly. "Operating beyond their margin of safety, the generators couldn't have lasted long. The fountain is gone, all right. And it will stay that way. I'm going to remember the lesson that Laverne learned too late—the force is too dangerous for human beings."

I stood up, and they turned to me. There was a deep silence now, and a cool wind. Dawn was deepening in the sky.

Nancy hurried forward and touched my face. "How do you feel?" she

asked anxiously.

"Slightly hysterical," I said.

She grinned and O'Connor said, "We have a lot to thank you for, Edward. We'll make it official later. Right now, think you'll be able to walk to Mal-

vern?"

"I'll try," I said. I didn't think I could walk, but somehow I did it. Maybe that was because I held Nancy's hand all the way.

THE END

The SPECTRAL NUN



By SANDY MILLER



THIS story is about an authoress who had a summer home on an island off the New England coast. She and her husband had not lived there long when one night she heard a creaking noise on the steps. She thought it was her husband and got up to see what was the matter. When she stepped into the hall she was astonished to see a large woman in the clothing of a nun. She was walking down the hall but turned to look at the authoress for a few moments. No one in real life could have looked more substantial, for she was broad shouldered and had the general appearance of a European peasant woman. She

smiled a friendly smile and then disappeared. There seemed to be no gradual fading. One instant she was there, and the next there was nothing at all.

Several months went by before she or her husband told anyone of the spectral nun. In the discussion she revealed that the woman was wearing the attire of a Mother Superior. An elderly neighbor who had never heard about the ghost told the authoress that her home had once been a retreat for a Catholic sisterhood. A Boston bishop had built it and given it to his sister who was a Mother Superior.

THE DEVIL THROWS STONES



By CAL WEBER



LATE in the sixteenth century, the home of George Walton was disturbed by stone-throwing antics of the devil. Walton had taken possession of a piece of land that his neighbor, an elderly woman, claimed was hers. She made quite a fuss about it and declared that Walton would never be allowed to quietly enjoy that ground. And she was right, for retribution began almost at once. Stones came from all directions at once on the Walton house. Stones seemed to come from the inside as well. All the windows were battered out, and when Walton ran out into the fields, the falling stones pursued him. There were some workers in the fields at the time and they were amazed, and set about searching for mysterious persons, but there was never a sign of a hand throwing these missiles. Inside the house it was even worse. Doors opened by themselves and large stones came rolling in, knocking over everything in their path. Accompanying all these strange happenings were weird noises of moaning and whistling. There was no doubt about it, among all those who witnessed the stone-throwing incidents. Only a devil could be capable of performing such spiteful mischief. All sorts of charms were used against them but with no luck. The unhappy Mr. Walton was nearly battered to pieces by the stones. He was hit forty times in one day while he was at work in the fields. His corn was

uprooted and his hayricks were scattered about. Some were in the tree-tops, and some were scattered throughout his house. His field hands were frightened into quitting, and Walton was left alone. He was unable to take care of his land by himself and it became useless. When the governor of the province was called in on the case, he just laughed and said it was the work of mischievous children. When Walton tried to prove his story, the disturbances suddenly stopped. So the old neighbor woman was never indicted for witchcraft.

A similar stone-throwing incident occurred in 1921. It was early September when stones began to drop upon the house and person of a French farmer. They fell at all hours of the day and night, and pursued him into the surrounding fields for a distance of two hundred and twenty feet from the house. His windows were all smashed and the door was broken in. No one could see where the stones came from for the house stood in the middle of a large, open field where no one could hide in order to throw the stones without being seen. The stones were never seen until just before they hit. Some came in a curve, and some dropped slowly as if they were dropped from only a six-foot height. This incident was witnessed by many including the local pastor who said that the previous owner had committed suicide.



As the surgeon cut into his skull, Marvin's mind shrieked in voiceless terror . . .

BRAINSTORM

By ALEXANDER BLADE

The weird brain operation had been a complete success. But could a detached mind segment have its own ego—and kill?

"GOOD morning, Marvin darling."

Mrs. Swank glanced up fearfully at her husband as he came into the kitchen. Then she lowered her eyes and finished pouring the coffee. Inaudibly, a sigh escaped her lips.

Marvin Swank crossed the linoleum floor of the kitchen to the breakfast nook, his leather heels beating a nervous tattoo as he walked. There were white half moons on the sides of his nose from the constant nervous flaring of his nostrils. His eyes were expressionless depths of black behind which lurked a fury of conflict and emotion.

He ignored Mary's greeting and, after sliding into place on the built-in bench, unfolding the morning paper, and taking his first swallow of coffee, all in one continuous movement, he ignored Mary herself.

She looked at the paper which hid her husband from view with a half sad, half speculative look in her blue eyes.

Her mouth opened to say something, then closed. Her face took on a half afraid, half resolute expression.

"Marvin," she said, "will you be home on time tonight? The Harpers are coming to dinner, you know."

The morning paper quivered slightly, then became ominously stationary.

Mary held her breath as she watched it. After a moment it sagged a fraction of an inch as the fingers which held it relaxed. Other than that, there was no response to her question.

"Marvin," she said, her voice more insistent.

The paper dropped with explosive suddenness. Marvin's face appeared, contorted with a mixture of emotions.

"Will you shut up and let me read the paper?" he said, each syllable a vicious, emphasized note of hate. "I only have this time at breakfast to keep up on the news. You can loaf around all day and take your time at the paper while I slave away at the office. Yet you begrudge me this minute or two. Why don't you leave me alone!"

Angrily he plowed his way out of the space between the bench and the table, upsetting his cup of coffee in the process.

Mary looked at his angry back until it vanished through the door to the front hall, then her eyes settled on the spreading spot of coffee as it drained from the overturned cup and spread over the tablecloth. A tear glistened in her eye and her lips quivered imperceptibly. But she didn't follow her husband. She had followed him yesterday morning in an effort to get him to

come back and finish his breakfast. The memory of that made her raise one hand and delicately run the tip of one finger over her cheek. It had taken an extra coating of powder base to hide the blueness of the bruise where he had slapped her before plunging out of the house.

MARVIN grabbed his hat and coat and slammed the front door as he went out. His thoughts were roaring in his head. They drowned out all other sound as he went down the front steps and walked with a rapid stride toward the el station.

Good God! Why does Mary always have to upset me every morning? Why can't she leave me alone? Everybody seems to be trying to see how they can upset me lately. Even strangers go out of their way to rub me the wrong way. Here come two strangers down the sidewalk side by side. I'd bet my bottom dollar that they deliberately try to make me step off the sidewalk. Well, I'll show them. Half the sidewalk is mine. If they don't give it to me, I'll take it anyway. I can be just as rude as the next fellow.

Marvin squared his shoulders and determinedly walked straight toward the oncoming couple. They were a man and woman. As they neared him they moved over slightly, so that they took up about two-thirds of the width of the sidewalk.

Marvin stiffened his shoulders and held to his full half. There was a satisfied grin on his taut lips as his shoulder bumped that of the woman and spun her half around.

He heard the startled "Hey!", but did not pause in his stride.

The stranger had caught his wife in time to save her from falling. His eyes looked puzzledly at Marvin's retreating back, then at the woman. He

shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"No use going after him," he said with a half thwarted chuckle. "The way he's started out this morning, he'll run into enough trouble before the day's over."

Ha! That'll teach them to keep to their own side of the sidewalk. Too many people expect everybody to climb up a tree or crawl out in the gutter so that they won't have to move their sweet little selves to one side. Well, no more crawling for me. That's what's wrong with me. I'm fed up with crawling for everybody, Mary included.

Marvin jaywalked and entered the el station. Paying his fare, he pushed through the turnstile and climbed the steps to the el platform.

A train was just pulling in. He was twenty minutes early. He would have time to stop in at the cafeteria near the office and get a bite to make up for the breakfast he had missed at home.

IT WAS the next day. Mary sat in the breakfast nook, her head hidden in the crook of her arm, her shoulders under the neatly tailored red plaid housedress convulsing from her sobs.

The evening before had been terrible. John and Lois Harper had come for dinner. It was an invitation of three weeks standing, and Marvin had been the one who had insisted on their coming over at the time.

At six thirty Marvin hadn't come home yet, so Mary had set the table and she and her guests had begun to eat. In the middle of the meal Marvin had arrived—as angry as when he had left in the morning.

He had been surly, answering the small talk at the table with uncommunicative grunts.

After dinner Mary and Lois had escaped to the kitchen, leaving Marvin and John in the living room smoking

cigars over their last cup of coffee.

When Mary and Lois had gone back into the living room, they encountered a silence pregnant with strained relations. They cheerfully ignored this, and Mary suggested a game of bridge.

The bridge game had gone smoothly for over an hour. Then Marvin had blown up over some misplay Mary had made which cost him a trick.

The Harpers had looked at each other queerly and Lois had looked pityingly at Mary.

At ten thirty they had left, insisting that John had to get up at five-thirty in the morning. Marvin hadn't even followed them to the door to say good-night. He had marched off to his room—their room.

When she had gone upstairs he was busy carrying shirts and things into the guest room. He calmly informed her that he had had enough of her for awhile, and was going to sleep in the guest room for the time being.

He had done it too. When she got up in the morning after a sleepless night she could hear him moving about the room. She went down to the kitchen and prepared the kind of waffles he always liked, and waited. When he came down he didn't even glance at the breakfast nook. Instead, he marched into the front hall and left the house without speaking to her.

That had been an hour ago. Mary had cried. She was still crying.

"If only it was something I had done," she sobbed aloud. "If only there were some cause for all this, however unjustified. But there isn't ANYTHING. Why does he act this way?"

The phone began ringing. Mary ignored it for awhile but it kept up its insistent call. At last, with a resigned sigh, she went and answered it. It was Lois Harper.

"Hello, Mary," Lois's voice came

over the receiver. "This is Lois."

"Oh, hello, Lois," Mary said, trying to make her voice sound happy. Then, in a resigned voice, "I'm sorry about last night. Marvin hasn't been feeling so well lately. You'll have to excuse him."

"I'm glad you mentioned that," Lois said, her voice sounding relieved. "John and I were talking about it. He insisted that I call you up. We want to come over and talk to you. John called up the office and told them he wouldn't be down today. He did that because he wants to see you about Marvin right away. May we come over?"

"Why yes," Mary said, mystified.

"All right," Lois said hastily. "We'll be right over."

Mary busied herself cleaning up the breakfast dishes while she wondered why they were coming and what they would have to say. She felt sure they were going to advise her to leave Marvin. She couldn't do that. They had been married too long. And really he WASN'T well. There was no CAUSE for him to be so upset all the time. It had been a whole month now since he had been his happy, joking self.

The doorbell rang just as Mary hung up the dish towel to dry. With a hasty glance in the mirror over the sink and a few quick dabs at her hair to make sure it was presentable, she left the kitchen.

She could see Lois and John through the glass of the front door. They had a serious, grim look about them, like people who are doing their duty and not liking doing it.

Mary squared her shoulders and pasted a wan smile on her face, then let them in.

Lois put her arm around Mary and gave her an affectionate squeeze.

"You look like you didn't sleep a wink all night, darling," she said.

"I didn't," Mary said listlessly. "Marvin moved himself into the guest bedroom last night after you left. I—I'm not used to sleeping all alone."

"That's what we came over about," John Harper said briskly. "Mary, do you realize that Marvin is ill? He's mentally ill, and you've got to do something about it. Why, he has built up a reputation as a good business man in this town, and if you don't see that he gets competent help right away he'll ruin everything he's spent years building up."

"What do you mean?" Mary asked, bewildered at this line of attack. She had expected John to insist that she leave Marvin and sue him for divorce. Instead he was hinting that something was her fault.

"I mean simply this," John said. "Bluntly, Marvin is not responsible for his actions right now. He's insane, to give it the name most commonly used. Most people won't know that. His clients, for example, will assume he's perfectly sane but impossible to deal with. They'll take their business elsewhere before long. If you don't take him to a psychiatrist—MAKE him go to one—it will be on your head that the blame will lie if he ruins his life."

"Are you serious?" Mary asked earnestly.

"I was never more serious in my life," John answered. "I think a great deal of Marvin. I don't like to see him this way any more than you do."

"But suppose he refuses to see a psychiatrist?" Mary asked. "Frankly, I don't think he will. I'm sure he's convinced that he's all right, and that everybody else is all wrong for some reason."

"Then there's only one thing to do," John said. "You must have him committed to a state hospital. They'll keep him confined and give him proper

treatments to make him well again. That would be the best course, because a psychiatrist would charge a fortune and confine him anyway."

"YOU mean put him in the insane asylum?" Mary asked, horrified. "That WOULD ruin his reputation. I can't do that!"

"Haven't you been reading the papers lately?" John asked in amazement. "They carry regular articles now to educate people about the state hospitals. It's no longer a stigma to have been in one. John will thank you when he gets well. If you don't do something he'll hate you the rest of his life."

"Maybe you're right," Mary said, wringing her hands in a frenzy of indecision and horror at the thought of what her common sense whispered she MUST do. "But how do you go about it? I don't know a THING about it."

"It's simple enough. We'll go with you. That's why I stayed home from work today," John said soothingly. "All you have to do is go to the sheriff's office and swear out a warrant for him. They'll pick him up at work and take him to the local hospital. There he'll be kept under observation for a few days. Then he'll go before the court held right in the hospital and the court will send him to the state hospital."

"I don't have to face him after I do this to him, do I?" Mary asked anxiously.

"You may have to in court," John said sympathetically. "But it won't be too bad. He'll understand when he gets well that you did it for the best."

"Oh, I can't," Mary said, breaking into tears again. "I can't have the sheriff going into Marvin's office and arresting him. That would be the last straw. He's mad enough as it is. If he had something REAL to be mad about he would be terrible. And what about

if they turn him loose?"

Her eyes mirrored the horror in her mind at the prospect of a Marvin, insanely angry, turned loose by a skeptical court. It would be the END.

"Don't worry," John said. "They won't turn him loose. Lois and I will act as witnesses with you. All you have to do is tell the truth about everything. The court is made up of competent psychiatrists. They'll recognize what state he's in better than you will.

"You MUST do it," Lois spoke up. "You are Marvin's wife. He needs you to take the step that is absolutely necessary to save both his business position and his life. There's no telling what he might do if left to the mercies of the insanity that holds him in slavery now."

Mary bowed her head. Almost inaudibly she whispered, "All right. If you'll come with me I'll do it."

"That's better," Lois said cheerfully. "Just a minute and I'll get your coat."

"Oh, I'd better get dressed up a bit first," Mary said, alarmed.

"No stalling now," Lois accused, still in the cheerful, joking voice. "The sheriff won't care what you look like. We'll go down in our car and bring you back. I'm going to stay with you the rest of the day and tonight so that you won't have to be alone a minute."

She went to the hall closet and took out Mary's coat and hat. John slipped the coat over her shoulders and took her arm in a firm grasp, leading her to the front door.

MARVIN entered the firm of Rawley, Bradstreet, and Jacobs, where he worked as an assistant credit manager, just as the time clock jumped to six minutes before nine.

After punching his card he frowned darkly at it. It was the fourteenth of the month, and there were a neat row of blue stampings which all said 8:52

A.M. This was spoiled by the latest stamping which said 8:54 A.M.

It was all Mary's fault. She shouldn't have upset him and made him eat downtown. The service had been slow, and he had taken a little more than twenty minutes to eat in the cafeteria.

He half expected someone to comment on his tardiness, but no one seemed to notice. He made his way through the main office, his feet planting themselves on almost the same spots they always landed on, so habitual was his daily routine.

Inside his own office he took off his top coat and hat and put them away in the metal locker reserved for them. Then he sat down at his desk, glancing over the list of appointments for the day. He checked the list against the credit reports on the clients and frowned over a couple of them.

This firm in Denver has been a good customer, but their credit rating has gone down lately. Now they went on O.K. for the biggest order they've ever placed with us. Probably expect to get rich on it. If I O.K. the deal and they go bankrupt it will be a black mark against me. If I don't O.K. it and they go to the chief, and he O.K.'s it, and they come through, it will be a worse slam on my judgment, because the firm may get the idea that I'm getting too cautious.

Just the same, my job is to protect the firm. But if I turn them down I'll always feel that if they go bankrupt it was my doings that did it. It means life and death to them or they wouldn't send their president in person.

Should I turn him over to the chief? I can't do that. The last time I tried that the chief said if I didn't feel capable of using my own judgment I'd better resign. He was right, too.

I'll make up my mind later.

Marvin pressed the button that

would bring his secretary. After a moment she came in.

Her name was Dorothy Ryan. A rather tall, well built blond, twenty-two years old, she had been Marvin's secretary for two years now.

She knew Marvin perhaps as well as did his wife, and neither liked nor disliked him. He was to her no more nor less than was her typewriter—one of the appurtenances of her job, and one which functioned as it should.

Yet lately she had been more and more aware that something was amiss with this gadget, Marvin. The way she put it to Marie, her girl friend, was, "He's taking his job too seriously the past few months. He used to do all right without half thinking, but now he's got to think things over like he was a judge in the Supreme Court."

This morning he looked worse to her. His features were tense and he seemed to be holding himself in like someone who wants to scream but doesn't dare.

After giving him a close scrutiny she opened her mouth, then shrugged her shoulders imperceptibly and went on chewing her gum. It was no skin off her back how he felt.

She smiled at Marvin and ignored his lack of response. He used to greet her with a half joking remark of some kind. Lately his old manner returned only about once a week. The rest of the time he kept his eyes on the letters he planned on answering, thinking over what he would say, and taking longer to think it out than he used to do.

He didn't seem unsure of himself so much as careful. Whereas before he had been confident he wouldn't make a mistake in judgment, now he seemed determined NOT to make a mistake. There was a difference.

After the dictation Dorothy retired to her own desk in the main office to

type out the letters for Marvin's signature.

She smiled at the president of the company in Denver who entered Marvin's office as she went out. He was a man of medium height with a baby complexion—the type of a man who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance without being a fop.

WHEN she sat down and pulled out her typewriter she forgot everything except getting her shorthand notes into letter form. The sooner it was done, the sooner she could steal down stairs to get her morning coffee and smoke, while exchanging gossip with other girls who were doing the same.

Ten minutes later the door to Marvin's office burst open. The man from Denver turned in the doorway and said bitterly, "I'll have your job for this before I'm through. See if I don't. I'll blacklist your company with all the local concerns all over the country. You can't kick me in the face and get away with it."

With that he turned and left, leaving the door to Marvin's office wide open.

Marvin came and closed it. Dorothy glanced up at his face momentarily, then back to her typewriter hastily. The expression on Marvin's face made her feel a little sick.

It was the expression of a man who has, for the first time in his life, bowled eleven strikes for a possible three hundred; then throws a gutter ball for the twelfth. It was the look on the dying face of a steeplejack who has just broken his neck by slipping off the bottom step of the back porch. It was the look on the face of a serious minded suicide who has just vomited his arsenal.

She made three errors in typing in the next ten seconds. Her eyes kept

glancing up at the expressionless frosted pane that was set in the door to Marvin's office.

Suddenly, for no reason at all, she wished fervently that he wasn't married, so that she could go in and take his anguished face in her two hands and smooth it out and take all his troubles upon herself.

She sniffed, angry at herself, and got up hastily. She was going to break precedent and have her second breakfast before she finished her morning typing.

MARY SWANK stepped off the elevator followed closely by John Harper, who did a quick double step to gain a position beside her in the crowd and take her arm protectively. Lois Harper followed closely.

The three walked along the musty hall and entered the wide portal over which was painted in gold leaf the sinister legend, Sheriff's Office.

The room inside ran the full width of the building, divided into two parts by a long counter. Behind the counter immediately in front of the entrance were three elderly men in blue uniforms and two in plain business suits.

"I'll do the talking," John whispered. He stepped up to the counter and asked one of the uniformed men where a warrant could be sworn out for an insanity hearing. The man pointed to the far end of the counter.

John took Mary's arm again and led her down to the proper section of the counter.

Mary could never remember the details of the next half hour afterwards. She answered questions automatically. They seemed endless. After they were all answered, and the middle aged woman behind the counter had accumulated a pile of filled out papers, Mary signed on the dotted line for several minutes.

After it was all over the woman behind the counter had given Mr. and Mrs. Harper a sharp look and suggested they stay with Mrs. Swank until Mr. Swank had been picked up.

They rode back down to the street floor on the rickety, ancient elevator. In Mary's heart a terrible, gnawing agony was growing. In her mind's eye she could see the officers of the law confronting her husband, and out of a clear sky telling him that he was under arrest on an insanity warrant.

She could see the look of unbelief, the shock of the thing.

Augmenting the torture the picture inflicted upon her was the terrible, terrible possibility that her husband was not going insane. That his growing irrationality was due to some secret trouble which he didn't feel he could share with her. If that were so, then she was doing him a great wrong.

Suppose the sheriff's men walked right into the office and showed their badges and said loudly that they were there to arrest Marvin. It would ruin him!

Suppose they did that and then the court turned him loose and said she had made a terrible mistake. What would it be like to go through the rest of her life hated by the man she loved because she had ruined his career and his reputation.

Mary's lips began to quiver. She took them in her teeth. They reached John's car, and once inside Mary gave way to her emotions. All the way home she cried unrestrainedly while Lois tried to comfort her.

She couldn't be comforted, however. Some place in the city right now there were two officers with a warrant for Marvin's arrest. Right this minute they might be standing outside his door waiting, while he, all unaware of what was about to happen, might be inside—hap-

py, carefree, perhaps joking with the men he worked with.

To her at this moment Judas was a piker.

DOROTHY RYAN sat at her desk typing. It was a little after eleven and she would have to hurry if she got through with her morning's work before lunch time.

Two heavy set men came into the office. She noticed them absently without interrupting her work. They talked for a moment with the receptionist, then made their way toward her desk.

A moment later they were standing in front of her.

"We're from the county-city building," one of the men said respectfully. "We want to see Mr. Swank on private business."

"I'm sorry," Dorothy said. "Mr. Swank is busy right now. Would you wait?" She pointed to a row of chairs along the wall.

The man hesitated.

"To tell you the truth," he said cautiously, "we have a lot to do today and can't wait very long. It's important that we see him, too." He glanced worriedly at his wristwatch, estimating that if they didn't get to see Mr. Swank for another ten minutes it would make them late for their lunch, what with having to take the man over to the hospital observation ward, maybe having to put him in a straitjacket to get him there, and all the many things that crop up on a detail like this.

Dorothy slid out of the cubbyhole of her desk and smiled sweetly at the two men.

"I'll tell Mr. Swank you're here," she said.

She knocked discreetly on Marvin's door and then went in. Marvin was at his desk, his head resting on the palms of his hands, his hair mussed, and his

eyes staring unseeingly at a letter laying on his desk.

He glanced up at her defiantly when she entered.

She smiled sweetly at him and didn't care that her heart was beating wildly.

"What is it?" Marvin asked in a tired voice.

"Two men from the county-city building to see you," she said. "They said it was important."

"Oh," Marvin said, rising. "I'll bet they want us to submit a bid on some equipment. Show them in."

He went over to the metal cabinet and opened the door. He stooped down so he could see his head in the mirror and combed his hair. While he did it he whistled a little tune to get himself into a cheerful frame of mind.

Dorothy waited until he was ready, then went out, nodding to the two men and leaving the office door open. They went in and closed the door behind them.

Marvin greeted them, with an enthusiastic smile.

"This is indeed a pleasure, gentlemen," he said in his best executive voice. "What can I do for you?"

While he said this he was shaking hands with them. They glanced at each other uncomfortably and shook his hand passively.

Marvin glanced from one to the other expectantly. They seemed at a loss as to what to say.

"Well?" Marvin prompted cheerfully.

One of the men fumbled inside his suit coat and pulled out a folded white paper.

"We're from the sheriff's office," he said gruffly. "This is a warrant for us to pick you up and take you to the observation ward at the county hospital." He held out the folded white paper.

Marvin looked at it without making any move to take it. The meaning of the words was sinking in slowly. Too slowly.

Suddenly he began to tremble.

"This is our job," the man said, watching Marvin carefully. "We have to take you in, so you may as well come along without any trouble."

Marvin took the paper and unfolded it with shaking hands. The signature at the bottom of the sheet was Mary's. Hastily he read it through. Then he handed it back.

THE realization was finally sinking in that his wife had sworn out a warrant stating that he was crazy—all on the strength of his being upset the day before and moving into the guest room.

That had been a mistake. He should have gotten a room in a hotel. Now he would be ruined. Probably everybody in the office knew what these men were here for. They were probably gathered around his door outside listening.

He gave a short, bitter, disillusioned snort. So he was crazy! You read about people being crazy, but it never occurred to you that YOU might go crazy. Maybe it was because you always thought of a crazy guy as someone who went around telling everyone he was Napoleon or something.

So science was progressing! So now if a guy was a little upset for a few days he was crazy. Millions of people did crazy things every day and nobody thought anything about it. He, Marvin, didn't eat his breakfast one morning, and then moved into the guest room where he wouldn't have to listen to Mary sleeping all night when he couldn't relax and get the day's work off his mind. So right away she swears he is a lunatic.

Marvin walked weakly around be-

hind his desk and sat down. The two men waited patiently. They could guess much of what was going on in Marvin's mind. On an average of two or three times a day throughout the year they watched the same awakening horror dawn in the mind of some person.

Sometimes they realized they were insane. Sometimes they were convinced someone was doing this for revenge, or anything at all except because they NEEDED to be put away for a while.

In the five years they had been on the insanity detail they had learned to tell pretty well whether the person was really insane. This experience had told them at once that Mr. Swank was badly in need of care. His face showed the long days of tenseness, the sleepless nights.

Undoubtedly, the man didn't suffer from delusions in the ordinary sense of the word. His mind was a motor that was burning itself out because it had lost its governor.

Most of this kind gave in without trying anything. Once in a while one of them tried to jump out of a window. One of the men stood ready to pounce upon Marvin if he made any sudden decision of this type.

Neither of the men spoke. They knew that Marvin realized they were just doing a routine job. They just stood motionless and waited for him to reach his decision.

After nearly five minutes Marvin pressed a button on his desk. At once the office door opened and the stenographer outside stepped in.

Marvin looked at Dorothy, noticing perhaps for the first time that she was very beautiful, and that her eyes had something in them that made them deep, delightful pools of blueness.

He allowed his face to relax slightly into a smile.

"I won't be back for the rest of the day," he said. "Something very important has come up. Turn the rest of my appointments over to Galvin, Dorothy."

She nodded speechlessly, her mind taking in the motionless calm of the two men.

Marvin got up and went to the metal cabinet, getting out his topcoat and hat.

Dorothy stood to one side as he went to the door. He stopped in front of her and looked at her, his eyes full of the misery that flooded his mind.

With a twisted smile on his face, he reached up and patted her cheek with the palm of his hand. Every cell of his body ached and strained for something that might have been; something he was saying goodbye to with a careless pat of the hand.

Then he went out the door and crossed the office, looking straight ahead. The two men followed him carelessly. They knew their job. Mr. Swank was not proven insane until the court adjudged him so. Many times men walked out of their offices or homes to go back to them in a couple of days, set free by the court, with no one realizing where they had been.

THE car was parked directly in front of the building. Aside from the license plate no one could have known it was a state police car.

One of the men stepped past Marvin and opened the rear door for him. He stooped and climbed in. The man closed the door. Then he climbed in the front seat while the other man walked around the front of the car and climbed into the driver's seat.

As the car moved out into the street Marvin noticed that the doors to the back of the car where he was sitting had their inside handles taken off. He

smiled ruefully to himself and leaned back.

He was beginning to acquire a fatalism toward things as they were developing now. He felt convinced that life, as he had known it up to now, was permanently over, and that there was nothing he could do to save it.

The car wound smoothly through the traffic. Occasionally the bored voice of a police announcer would sound through the dashboard radio. Once, the man who wasn't driving took a microphone off a cradle on the dashboard and reported that they were on the way to the hospital with item four.

After a while the tall hospital structure came into sight several blocks away. A few minutes later the smooth riding car turned into the driveway that went behind the hospital and drew to a halt on a parking strip.

The two men climbed out. The one on the right waited until his companion came around to stand beside him. Then he opened the door so Marvin could get out.

The three of them marched into the building through a door with an emergency sign painted on the glass. Just inside a nurse sat behind a window like those in a ticket seller's booth.

The two men went through Marvin's pockets, taking out everything and laying it on the counter where the girl reached through the glass and pulled everything in, listing it on a blank form. They gave him back his handkerchief. His cigarettes and book of matches went into a big envelope along with his wallet and keys. He looked back longingly at the cigarettes as he was led toward the elevator.

While they waited for the elevator he heard the nurse speak over the telephone saying that another one was on the way up. Matter of fact. Routine. Just like that.

To her he was not a human being who had just seen his world and his life crumble into choking dust. To her he was—crazy.

After nearly ten minutes the elevator came. It was like all hospital elevators—incredibly slow and inefficient. It took a full five minutes to get to the seventh floor. During that time a woman could have had a baby, a man could have bled to death, and the whole building could have turned into a blazing inferno of heat.

AND NOW, a man in the prime of life, with a home all paid for, a nice wife, a good position near the top of the ladder in the company he had worked for since his early twenties, was inch by slow inch departing from all that meant anything to him.

What would he meet? He wondered as he stood in the slowly rising elevator, with the two deputy sheriffs propped like immobile statues on motionless legs.

One of them came to life enough to glance at his wrist watch. It was three minutes to twelve.

"We'll be a little late," he murmured. The other merely nodded.

At last the elevator came to a stop. One of the men pulled back the grill work door and then the solid door on the landing. He held them open while the other man took Marvin's arm and firmly moved him out of the elevator.

The hallway outside was only about thirty feet long. At either end were twin doors with a substantial, heavy look. The one at the right end of the hall said MEN. The other said WOMEN.

As they walked toward the one marked MEN the door opened. A short, heavy set man in white trousers and a white shirt opened this door and pushed a truck on rubber wheels out into the

hallway as they approached.

Carelessly piled on the truck was a large fistful of rumpled, much worn men's clothing.

HIS face lighted up with recognition as his eyes took in the approaching trio.

"Hi, Bill, Avery," he said amiably.

"Hello, Ned," one of the men said. The other merely grinned.

Marvin's eyes were drawn to the pile of clothing on the truck. In some subtle way it seemed to be flowing and moving.

He bent over to look closer. All over the clothes small bugs were crawling in what seemed to be a never ending movement.

"See what you brought me a couple of hours ago?" the man in white was saying.

"Yeah, I know," one of the officers answered. "We picked him up downtown in a flop house. The manager called us in."

Marvin felt his arm jerked mildly. He straightened and went through the door. Inside a husky looking man looked him over calmly, then motioned him to follow.

Toward the end of the row of doors the man motioned him to go into a room. After he was in the door closed on his back.

He turned. The door was solid and strong. Even with his head, a one foot square lacework of heavy screen wire served as a peep hole so that he could see out into the corridor. At the opposite side of the room two windows with bars outside gave a view of the building spires of the downtown area, a mile or so away.

Against one wall an iron cot rested, a thin mattress, sheets, and a brown army blanket over it. By the window was an old rocking chair.

THE next three days were a nightmare to Marvin. Half an hour after he arrived a hurly attendant made him strip, and then examined him as though he were searching for fleas. He was given a hospital jacket and a pair of cloth slippers.

When he asked for a smoke the attendant calmly told him he wouldn't be allowed to smoke. When he asked for lunch he was told it was too late for lunch. He would have to wait for the evening meal.

The afternoon had been interminably long with hunger, craving for a smoke, and a complete dearth of things to occupy the mind, making each moment seem an hour.

The evening meal had been worse than nothing at all. The coffee was cold, the plate of indifferent vegetables was cooked by an artist in the field of making food unpalatable. Only hunger had forced him to eat it, coupled with the realization that it was hopeless to ask for anything better.

At eight o'clock a male nurse had come in and taken his temperature—not the way they do with normal patients, but as they do with dogs and other animals. Then he had given him a shot in the arm.

Half an hour later he felt sleepy. He welcomed the feeling. If he could sleep it would help pass the time. He lay down on the hard cot and closed his eyes. The drowsiness increased, and then, just as he was about to go to sleep, his mind went through the shift that had become familiar to Marvin and became far more alert than during the daytime.

Accompanying this acuteness of the mind was an insistent feeling of discomfort in any position. That, too, was old stuff. For months now he had been that way every night.

After an hour he gave up trying to

sleep. The shot in the arm had made him more restless, if anything.

Hours later he called for the nurse. A new man appeared. Marvin explained he couldn't sleep. He asked if he could go to the lavatory.

"Just a minute," the nurse said, then went back toward the desk which was out of sight of Marvin's peephole.

A few minutes later he returned with another man. He unlocked the door and the two stepped inside. Before Marvin realized what was happening he was on the floor with one of the men sitting on him. The other expertly slipped something with long sleeves over his arms and tied it in back of his neck.

Then he was let up and strings at the ends of the closed sleeves were tied together at his back. They had put him in a straitjacket.

He had heard of such things, of course. He had never seen one.

"It's for your own good," the nurse said with apparent sincerity.

"But I can't stay in this," Marvin said, horrified. "It'll drive me nuts if I can't move my arms a little."

Already the terrible compulsion to move, move, MOVE, was taking hold of the muscles and bones of his imprisoned arms.

"Please," Marvin pleaded.

The two men ignored his plea and went out, locking the door behind them.

"Come back!" Marvin cried hoarsely. "Come back!"

His arms were rapidly approaching the point where their discomfort dominated his mind to the exclusion of everything else.

"Oh, God," he prayed. A low moaning whimper escaped his lips as he paced back and forth.

A face appeared at the square opening in the door. Once again the door opened. The two men came in and forced him to lie down. Then they

strapped him in bed.

When they went out they left the door open.

Marvin squirmed violently in a vain attempt to relieve the torture of his muscles. It became unbearable.

Finally his mental restraint deserted him. Scream after scream hurst from his lips.

The two men returned for the third time. They stood looking down at him silently for a moment.

"Oh, God," Marvin said, "Can't you have just an ounce of mercy. I haven't done anything to anybody."

One of the men looked questioningly at the other. The other nodded and went out. Shortly he came back with a black sock with something bulging in its toe.

HE BENT over Marvin and brought the sock up over his head. Marvin saw it descend in a short, vicious arc. Then blackness swept over him. Even as he blacked out he felt an anticipatory relief at the prospect of being unconscious.

When he awoke it was light. The sun's rays were streaming in through the windows and outside the blue sky seemed to reach into infinity.

Marvin lay quiet, rejoicing in the utterly relaxed comfort of his body.

Later, the day attendant who had been on when he came in the day before looked in on him. After that the straitjacket was removed and he was given a breakfast of two greasy eggs, a metal cup of lukewarm coffee, some rancid tasting fried-boiled potatoes, and one slice of stale bread thinly spread with butter which must have been put on melted, with a hush.

An hour after that he was led to a small room where he lay back in a harber chair and submitted to having his hands tied under the chair, after which one of the nurses shaved him.

At ten o'clock Mary had appeared with the Harpers—all three looking solemn and funereal. Mary had spent most of the visit crying.

Marvin had just looked at them coldly. He understood now how Mary had gotten the idea to have him locked up. That had been the doings of John Harper, without doubt.

Marvin resolved calmly to kill John when and if he ever regained his freedom. As for Mary, what she had done was too much to be even considered in the light of forgiveness or forgetting. The memory of the night of hell was still fresh.

He realized that the nurse's report would be given to the psychiatrist, and it would damn him for sure. He knew with a terrible certainty that he would not be released. He would go to the insane asylum. He knew that, so he just sat on the edge of his cot and let Mary go through her crying spell and feel secure in her delusion that she was doing everything for the "best."

The doctors wouldn't believe that her basic reason for listening to John was the realization that she had lost her husband already. In her small, cheap way she would rather go through life as the poor, suffering wife of a crazy man in the insane asylum than as the cast-off failure of a wife—ex-wife of a decent citizen and human being.

After a while they left, at the firm insistence of the male nurse. Marvin answered their farewells with a silent sneer of contempt. Then he turned his back on them.

Marvin ate his lunch and almost convinced himself that he could like cold coffee and tasteless food.

After lunch an old man in a tweed suit came into the room and introduced himself as one of the doctors on the court staff.

"Any chance of my being freed?"

Marvin asked cynically.

"I'm afraid not," the doctor shook his head. "You are too pronounced a type. I'm afraid there is no question of doubt strong enough to bring about your release. If you could learn to realize that you are better off in the care of experts right now it would help you to resign yourself to hospitalization."

"In other words I'm crazy. That it?" Marvin said.

"No," the doctor said slowly. "Not crazy. We know a little more about you due to the discoveries made during the war. Your mind is emotionally unbalanced and unable to relax normally because of that unbalance. Fortunately we know pretty much what to do about it now. I think it's safe to say that in not more than a couple of months you will be able to go out into the world and resume your old place, a completely normal man."

THE second night he had not been knocked out with the sock black-jack. Instead, he had been left to his torments, strapped in bed with the straitjacket pinning his arms across the chest.

The two night nurses had argued about whether to knock him out. They had decided two nights in a row, with the court examination coming up, would make it too risky. At the last they had gagged him, after making sure he had no adenoids.

An hour later Marvin's mind had snapped. He settled into a mousing, monotonous moaning, and then into unconsciousness. A bitterness was growing in him.

He knew that if he were not put in the straitjacket he could move his arms and not suffer. The male attendants didn't care about how he felt. All they were concerned with was that none of the patients make noises that might get

on their nerves.

The sun was just beginning to make inroads on the darkness of night when he drifted off into slumber. He was awakened by one of the day attendants who fed him without removing the straitjacket.

After that he was shaved again, strapped to the barber chair. Then, still in the straitjacket, he was led into a room where several people sat around a long table.

Mary was there. So were John and Lois Harper. So was the doctor who had already convicted him in his own mind. It was short and snappy.

Marvin turned his back contemptuously on Mary's agonized face with its swollen, red rimmed eyes and marched back to the ward.

In the ward again he was given a shot in the arm and the straitjacket was taken off. An hour later he was given another shot in the arm. After that things lost their appearance of reality.

Suddenly it was morning and the day nurses were slipping his trousers on him and forcing his shoes on his feet.

Then the sound of the elevator door penetrated his consciousness and he thought humorously that now he could REALLY sleep, because it would take an eternity to get down to the main floor.

The thought of the main floor startled his mind into wakefulness. Was he being set free?

He tried to hold the question in his drugged mind and find an answer to it, but was unable to.

With no apparent passage of time between his moment of wakefulness on the elevator and his next moment of awareness he was in an automobile with several other men, speeding along a highway out in the country.

He looked at these men curiously. One was a scrawny old man. Another

was an evil looking fellow with a large chin. Another was a sallow complexioned kid, no more than eighteen years old.

When the automobile turned off the highway into the driveway that wound among flowerbeds to the men's receiving ward in the main building of the state hospital, Marvin was too far gone to be aware of anything.

His drugged muscles responded automatically when he was jerked out of the car and led down an incline and through a door, but his mind could not register the end of the journey.

MARY looked around after she stepped from the bus. Immediately in front of her was a cobblestone arch through which a road passed, leading into the hospital grounds. A sidewalk followed along beside it for those who walked.

Hesitantly she took to the sidewalk, hoping it would lead to the right building of the many that were scattered over the landscaped acres that stretched out before her.

It had been three weeks since that day when she explained the things that had been happening that made her convinced that Marvin wasn't well.

When they had asked her if Marvin had any delusions such as being someone he obviously wasn't, or being convinced someone was persecuting him, or someone trying to kill him, she had had to answer in the negative. But her heart had dropped into her shoes.

Marvin had never done a single thing that could absolutely be called crazy. She had to admit that, and after admitting it was sure the court of three old men would turn him loose. If they had done that she didn't know what she would have done.

They hadn't, though.

Unaccountably, Marvin had been in

a straitjacket. That puzzled her, as he had never been violent nor REALLY insane. No explanation had been given her, and she swallowed the doubt in her mind and decided that she must really trust the state doctors all the way. She was helpless to do otherwise.

The day before, she had received a letter from the head of the state hospital asking her to come down. He had something to discuss with her.

The letter was in her purse now, as she walked past the geranium beds toward the entrance to the main building.

The lawn that stretched endlessly was very fresh and green. There were many trees scattered about, which gave the campus the appearance of a thinly wooded, lawned forest.

Everywhere were hushy tailed squirrels, scampering about and twitching their tails saucily. Her mind said, "Squirrels outside and the nuts inside." She chuckled and then felt guilty. MARVIN was in there. And he wasn't a nut. He was only sick.

At last she reached the entrance to the building and climbed the granite steps, passing from the bright sunlight into the quiet gloom of the interior.

Inside she handed her letter to the white clad girl at the reception desk who read it rapidly and then said, "Oh, yes. Just be seated over there, Mrs. Swank, and the doctor will be free to see you in a few moments." She pointed toward a group of woven white chairs with cushions made of a reddish patterned cloth.

A neat sign on a table stated that the woven furniture had been made by patients in their occupational therapy.

Mary watched people come in and go out. The sound of the telephone operator in a small room behind the reception desk could be heard over the quiet murmurs of the other people.

Finally the receptionist called Mary

and told her to go down the hall and enter the last door on the left. Wishing that John and Lois were with her to give her courage, Mary followed the girl's directions, knocking timidly before opening the door to the superintendent's office.

INSIDE a small, emaciated looking man was sitting behind a huge desk on which papers were piled in disarray. He glanced up at her entrance and greeted her with a broad smile intended to set her at ease.

"Good morning, Mrs. Swank," he said. "I'm Doctor Killair, the superintendent. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I suppose you want to know how your husband is coming? He's doing quite well, everything considered. You won't be able to see him today, however, as he is under hydrotherapy at present."

He dismissed hydrotherapy with a vague movement of his hands.

"For some patients hydrotherapy is about all we can give them," he went on. "But your husband is one of those fortunates that will respond admirably to the new technique for curing certain types of mental illness."

He adjusted his glasses and opened a file folder lying in front of him.

"These are the notes on your husband," he explained. "In here are the reports from the observation ward where he stayed when he was first committed, the reports of the doctors here who have had him, and also the nurses' routine reports. They all add up to one thing,—hyperactivity of the frontal lobe. Unbalance of the moral factor."

"Fortunately for you, and him, we have one of the finest brain surgeons in the country on our staff. He is a specialist who has performed many operations of the type that must be performed on your husband."

"An operation?" Mary said, puzzled.

"Yes," Doctor Killair replied. "You must have read about the operation developed during the war to cure certain types of mental unbalance."

"It's called prefrontal lobotomy. There was quite a writeup about it with very good pictures in a popular magazine several months ago."

"Oh yes," Mary exclaimed. "I remember now. It was in *Life*. Do you really think that will make Marvin well?"

She leaned forward eagerly in her chair, waiting for his answer.

"Of course," the doctor said, "we can never guarantee anything for certain. But your husband is the ideal type to respond a hundred per cent to this type of operation, and we feel that if anything can cure him, that can."

"We have to have your permission to perform the operation, of course. That's why I asked you to come down here so soon. If we can get the operation over with, your husband will be able to resume his former life that much sooner, and all we can do for him until the operation is just a stopgap, so to speak."

"Of course I'll give my consent," Mary said. "I'll be glad to. I have to sign some papers? Where are they? How soon can you perform the operation?"

The doctor smiled at her eagerness. He picked up a paper lying near him and read it to make sure it was the right one. Then he turned it around and extended it across the desk.

"Just sign here," he said, making a light pencil check where he wanted her to sign.

"That will be all today," he said after she had signed. "The operation will be performed sometime next week. After that it will be perhaps two weeks before you can see him. By that time he will

bave made his mental adjustment, and the danger of a relapse will be over. I must warn you that he will be permanently affected by the operation. He won't be quite as bright as he used to be. That will be compensated for by the fact that he will never get angry, will always be agreeable, and pleasant. He will lose much of his sense of humor, but that won't be missed much unless his major interest before was joking."

"Oh no," Mary said. "He was always quite serious."

"Fine," the doctor said vaguely. "That will be all." He rose and extended his hand.

Mary shook hands with him and left his office. After she had gone a side door opened and another man came in.

"Did she agree?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," Dr. Killair said calmly.

"Good," the newcomer said. "The only way we can get statistical results is to do the operation on large numbers of patients."

"I WONDER what really takes place in the brain when the frontal lobe is cut off from all contact with the rest of the brain," Dr. Killair said thoughtfully.

"You mean, what happens to the thoughts in the frontal lobe when they can't find outlet?" the newcomer asked. "That is of no concern. Results are what count. The operation cures almost invariably. The part of the mind that controls the body, the speech, and actions, becomes normal."

"But wouldn't it give the same results if the frontal lobe were destroyed and the space it occupies filled with a jelly?" asked Dr. Killair.

"Too dangerous," the newcomer replied. "This way we damage only a few nerve tubes. The toxics set free by their dissolution aren't enough to

barm the tissue."

"Of course I'm not a surgeon," Dr. Killair said. "I'm a psychiatrist. As such I'm naturally interested in the possible functioning of that frontal lobe after it is cut off from all contact with reality. You know, I've been curious about the special functioning of that frontal lobe ever since the results of the first prefrontal lobotomy were published."

He chuckled embarrassedly.

"It's not scientific for a psychiatrist to believe in the existence of a soul," he went on. "Still, it seems strange to me that the frontal lobe, whose growth differentiates man from the beasts, should be the seat of the conscience. It seems too much of a coincidence that the seat of the conscience should reach full development in man, and then a universal faith in the immortality of the person come into existence, without there being something vital about that frontal lobe."

"What are you driving at, doctor?" the newcomer said sharply.

"Simply this," Dr. Killair said. "Suppose that instead of curing the insanity, you are imprisoning the spirit or psyche, so that it can neither escape the bonds of flesh nor find a normal outlet for its growth and development. The fact that its ravings and screamings and sufferings are permanently withheld from expression, so that the shell, or hulk, of the individual appears to be happy and normal, doesn't alter the fact that that frontal lobe IS STILL ALIVE AND FUNCTIONING."

"Hmm. I see what you're driving at, doctor," the man said thoughtfully. "Just like putting a man under ether so that he's unconscious is not considered a cure for insanity just because the patient isn't raving or dangerous while unconscious."

"That's a good illustration," Dr.

Killair said.

"Well, how're you going to prove the frontal lobe is still an integrated personality and suffering hopelessly, assuming that to be the case?" the man asked.

"I don't know," Dr. Killair said slowly. "But suppose that instead of actually cutting the nerve connections to the frontal lobe they were frozen by some chemical that wore off in, say, a year's time. Something like methyl alcohol. The results would be the same as the prefrontal lobotomy, but in a year's time the frontal lobe would again have access to expression. If, during that year out of contact with the organs of expression, the frontal lobe remained insane, remained or became an integrated entity which suffered continually, then we would have to revise our concepts about the practicality of the present methods."

"Why are you bringing all this up at this time?" the man asked irritably. "We've had twenty-seven lobotomies in two months—all successful. You've never said anything before."

"I've brought it up, Dr. Evanays," Dr. Killair said firmly, "because I would like for you to try such a stunt on Mr. Swank. I know there are half a dozen ways the frontal lobe could be cut off functionally without damaging the nerve connections. Give him a year. We don't need to tell a soul about it. At the end of a year we can know for sure what has happened to that section of the mind that is shut up in darkness, but not destroyed. Who knows? Maybe that darkness is good for it. Maybe when the frontal lobe regains its powers of expression and influence in the person it will have recovered completely and developed rationally."

"If it hasn't—if during that year it has been active, conscious within itself, suffering with madness and wild, uncon-

trollable unbalance, we will know that the prefrontal lobotomy is merely a form of inhuman torture too fiendish for comprehension, not recognized because it is invisible."

Dr. Evanays' eyes lit up. At heart he was a pioneer. An experimentalist. Already his trained mind was examining and weighing different methods.

"We could keep it quiet," he said thoughtfully. "If we fail, we can afford a casualty, since we are already overdue on one. We can warn Mrs. Swank that there might be latent effects that won't show up for several months, and that we must have an immediate report if anything out of the way results at any time within a year. At worst we would only have to perform the operation as it should have been performed if the frontal lobe is still too irrational."

"Then you'll do it?" Dr. Killair asked incredulously.

"Of course, doctor," Dr. Evanays said. "It was your idea, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Dr. Killair said smiling, "but I never dreamed you'd take me up on it."

"SLEEPY . . . what are they going to do to me?"

The masked faces looking down blurred, retreating infinitely at great rapidity, yet staying ever close. They retreated and advanced ever closer at the same time. They divided and then blended together again. Now they were spinning, spinning . . .

The whirlpool was black. And the masked faces were in the whirlpool . . . whirling round and round.

There was only the vortex—the black, black night of the vortex, retreating into blacker black. So black that it was red. So red that it was black. So . . . black . . .

Voices. Rasping feelings with no

sound. Rasping. Grinding . . .

And the pink whirlpool blending into red into black black black.

Stars. Stars that flashed and twinkled.

Fear! Muddy red fear streaks in the whirling black whirlpool—streaking faster and thinner.

Fire! Or was it just light that flashed in the blackness.

"God! I must think! I must have thought to cling to! I want to HEAR! I want to see! I want to SEE! WHAT ARE THEY DOING?"

"WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO ME?"

"Black swirling blackness-redness. Lightning fla-saaaAAHHHHGH!"

"I am Marvin Swank."

PART II

IT WAS nine months since Marvin had been released from the hospital. Nearly eleven months since his operation. Time had passed swiftly for him; time that had been full of the simple joy of living.

He had awakened from the operation to find himself wondering in amazement how he could have been so upset about every little thing, and sometimes over nothing at all. He had frankly admitted that he was undoubtedly insane before the operation.

So far as his mental outlook was concerned, he could have gone home the week after the operation, but both Dr. Killair and Dr. Evanays had insisted that it was necessary to stay until all danger of cerebral hemorrhage was past.

Mary had visited him almost daily, and after his release they had gone on a second honeymoon. In a thousand little ways he rediscovered how much he loved her.

Then, when he went back to the

office, he found that no one knew he had been in the state insane asylum. They all believed he had had a serious brain hemorrhage and had just barely missed dying.

His wife had told him that as soon as the sheriff's office called and said he had been taken to the observation ward she had called the office and told them he had had an attack of some kind and been taken to the hospital. She had hinted at a heart attack and other things, pretending she didn't know exactly what had happened.

Dorothy had clinched the illusory picture by telling sympathetically how she had noticed for some time that her boss had been suffering from something, but that he had nobly never complained.

The office force had greeted him with open arms, and he had discovered with his fresh, normal outlook how much of friendship and pleasure he had passed by before.

The day he had left the hospital he had invited both doctors to drop in any time they wished and continue the pleasant acquaintance that had begun.

To his and Mary's surprise both doctors had come, bringing their wives, soon after he and Mary had returned from their second honeymoon.

Thereafter, every two or three weeks, the two doctors and their wives would make a special trip into the city to spend an evening with Marvin and Mary.

John and Lois were always ready on a moment's notice to come over and make the little party complete. Marvin found himself unable to thank John properly for his part in leading him to complete sanity.

In fact, everyone was so nice that Marvin often found himself almost too happy. His eyes would cloud over with tears of pure joy. Mary, seeing this,

would respond womanlike and cry from sheer happiness.

Yes. Though the months had sped by almost too quickly for the mind to grasp their short duration, they had been rich months, full of things which make life completely worth while.

There were times when he wondered why two busy doctors who met and dealt with hundreds of people continually could want to take the time to carry on a friendship which had begun so professionally. Marvin was not conceited enough to think his or Mary's charm was so outstanding that it had captivated two men so foreign to their own walk of life.

BUT there seemed no answer, so Marvin had accepted their friendship as one of those things that come for no reason at all, and enjoyed the long discussions the two doctors continually engaged in about their professions.

If he occasionally saw too professional a gleam in their eyes as they looked at him he put it down to their habitual professional outlook toward a patient and former patient. It didn't bother him in the least; he was utterly, delightfully, one hundred per cent sane for the first time in his life.

He showed it, too, as he skipped up the front steps and caught Mary in his arms, giving her a playful kiss that deliberately mussed her lipstick.

It was Friday evening, and they were invited to spend the weekend at the state hospital as the guest of Dr. and Mrs. Killair in their resident house. It would be a nice weekend. Bridge, Friday evening, a trip to a nearby lake Saturday, and just relaxing all day Sunday.

The Harpers were going along.

"Hurry up and get out of your things," Mary said. "The Harpers will drop by to pick us up at seven. Unless

you want to do the dishes I'll have to hurry to get everything done by the time they get here."

"Sure, I'll do the dishes," Marvin said. "Don't you go fussing about the time."

He put his arms about her waist and lifted her off her feet, whirling her around twice before he set her down. Then, hooking his arm in hers, he pushed through the door into the house.

It was ten minutes before eight when John's car turned off the highway and passed through the archway into the now familiar, almost homelike, landscaping of the hospital grounds.

The resident houses were off to the right, away from the main buildings. Shortly John stopped in the driveway to Dr. Killair's house while Marvin, Mary, and Lois climbed out. Then he drove the car into a vacant stall in the two-car garage and joined them.

Mrs. Killair opened the front door and came out to meet them. She was in her late fifties, and had become almost a mother to them. She came down the steps and possessively took the arm of Marvin and Mary and led them up the steps; chatting happily.

The Harpers followed, joining in the small talk. When they entered the house Dr. Killair was coming down the stairs from the second floor, straightening his tie. He had just finished dressing.

"Good evening, Marvin," He said warmly. "And Mary." He took her hand in his and squeezed it fondly. "You're looking more beautiful every day, my dear. But don't let my wife hear me say that," he added hastily. Then he winked at Mary and smiled at his wife who was beaming at him.

"He's just an old fool," Mrs. Killair accused. "Sometimes I honestly believe he really does fall in love with

every pretty face he meets."

"Oh, now, Martha," Dr. Killair said defensively. "You know I don't fall in love with ten per cent of them."

"Yes, I know," she said, trying unsuccessfully to sound serious. "But oh that ten per cent!"

"How are you, John, and Lois?" the doctor greeted the Harpers.

"Just fine, doctor," John replied.

LOIS wrinkled her nose at Dr. Killair and said, "You have to tell me you love me, too, or I'll be jealous of Mary."

"Shhh," the doctor hissed, looking around cautiously at his wife.

She tried to glare at him. Then she said, "Just pile your wraps in the closet and make yourselves comfortable. The Evanays will be over in a moment. Arthur," looking at her husband sternly, "make yourself useful and take their overnight bags up to the two guest rooms."

"Oh, hé doesn't need to do that," Marvin and John said, almost in unison. "We'll take them up ourselves."

Footsteps sounded on the front porch and Dr. and Mrs. Evanays came in.

Dr. George Evanays and his wife seemed well matched. He was six feet tall, well built, with the strong intelligent face of a doctor, the kind of face that inspires confidence. His deep blue eyes had a calm analytic look that never changed.

His wife Arna was five feet six, blonde in contrast to her husband's coal black hair, with a smooth, peach colored skin and features that had inspired many people to ask her why she had never tried out for Hollywood.

They were both young. The same general age as the Swanks and the Harpers.

Dr. Evanays carried a sack under his

arm. He laid it carefully down while he took off his topcoat.

"What's that?" Dr. Killair asked curiously.

"Just a little refreshment," Dr. Evanays replied, winking at Marvin.

"We ought to get together on these things," John Harper said. "I have a little refreshment out in the car, myself."

"We have enough to get good and drunk then," Dr. Killair put in. "I brought a little refreshment, too, out in the kitchen."

"Weell, now," George Evanays said, affecting a Scotch accent, "if it's all the same to ye, I'll be takin' my rrrrefreshments back to the storrrre and getting my money rrrrefunded."

"Oh no you don't," Mrs. Killair smiled. "If it's all the same to ye we'll be adrinkin' yourrrr rrrrefreshments first. So there." She tossed her head indignantly and sniffed.

George laughed and surrendered his sack to Mrs. Killair who promptly took it out into the kitchen, as if fearful that he would try to carry out his threat and take it back.

A moment later she came down the stairs. At everyone's look of surprise she explained.

"I had forgotten all about guest towels," she said. "The two guest bedrooms are at the front of the house. You can take your pick as to which room which will sleep in when you get around to it."

"Maybe I'd better get the overnight bags out of the car before it gets too dark," George said, going toward the front door.

When he came back Marvin insisted on taking them the rest of the way upstairs.

As he climbed the stairs Arna Evanays said, "I'll go up and straighten up a bit. Your bathroom is the same

place as ours isn't it, Martha?" She looked at Mrs. Killair questioningly as she asked this.

"Down to a quarter of an inch," Dr. Killair cut in. "So are the bedrooms. So are the shingles on the roof. These resident houses are all exactly alike."

Arna skipped rapidly up the steps until she had caught up with Marvin.

"I'll help you," she said, smiling.

He grinned and relinquished a suitcase. The two of them disappeared above.

Dr. Evaney's eyes followed them until they were out of sight.

"Well," he said brightly, "we might as well break into our refreshments early, since we seem to have more than enough." He pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen and could be heard rummaging about. The sound of the refrigerator door being slammed shut, the sound of running water in the sink, and the clinking of ice in glasses told that he was busy.

MARVIN came hack downstairs. As he reached the foot of the stairs Dr. Evaney's poked his head through the kitchen door and asked if anyone had a jack knife.

"There's a cork screw in the drawer under the drain board," Mrs. Killair said.

"Oh, that'll do," Dr. Evaney's said. His head pulled hack in. It popped out again at once. "Sit down and relax, everybody," he said. "I'm the bartender tonight. By the way, turn on the radio someone. Let's have a little music." His head disappeared again.

Dr. Killair was sitting in his favorite chair next to the radio. Automatically he reached over and switched it on. In less than a minute the quiet music of an orchestra stole out over the room.

It was a little too loud. Dr. Killair reached over and turned the volume

down a little. After a moment Dr. Evaney's pushed open the kitchen door and held it with his foot while he maneuvered a large tray through the doorway. On it were eight tall glasses.

He let the door swing shut and then balanced the tray on one hand. Draped across the other arm was a tea towel, neatly folded. Acting the part of a high class bartender he served the drinks while everyone chuckled.

Then he took his own drink and set the tray on the dining table, with one glass still in it.

"Arna had better stop primping and get down here," he said, "or she will get left out." He dropped into an easy chair, and stretched his long legs to their full length, and sipped his drink with a satisfied sigh.

"Oh, give her time," Mrs. Killair said curtly. "Women don't have much in life except to look nice. Although I must admit she looked perfect to me when she came in."

"Well," Dr. Killair said, snapping out of a reverie, "Suppose we set up the card tables and get started." He stood up and went over to the closet and took out two card tables, handing one to Marvin who had stood up to help him.

Mrs. Killair got the cards and score pads out of the drawer in the desk by the front window while the two men set up the tables.

Dr. Evaney's gathered chairs, while Mary and Lois stood up so that their chairs could be moved over to the tables. After the chairs were in place he gathered up the empty glasses.

At the kitchen door he turned.

"Why don't one of you girls take the hull by the horns and go up and tell Arna that we're all ready to start playing?" he asked.

"I'll go up," Lois volunteered. "I want to do a little primping myself."

"Well, don't you be too long," Dr. Killair said.

"Don't worry," Lois said, wrinkling her nose at him. She turned and tripped lightly up the stairs.

THE radio crooned softly. A violin played into the microphone while piano and band instruments played a soft accompaniment. It was a familiar tune, and shortly, from the kitchen, Dr. Evaney's baritone voice sang the words.

He pushed open the kitchen door and repeated his earlier performance of getting through with a tray full of glasses and his voice burst into full volume as he affected an operatic, farcical style for the finale of the song.

Lois came down the steps from above. She was holding a small mirror in front of her face and putting a few last minute touches of powder on her face.

"Where's Arna?" Mrs. Killair asked.

"She'll be down shortly," Lois answered without taking her eyes off of her close inspection of her features. At the foot of the stairs she put her mirror and powder puff in her purse and accepted her glass from Dr. Evaney's, then sat down at one of the card tables.

"Well," Dr. Evaney's said softly, "we might as well start one game, anyway. Who's ready?"

"I am," Dr. Killair said.

"So am I," Lois said dryly, putting her compact away. She sat down at the card table.

"How about you, Marvin?" Dr. Killair asked.

"Better let Mary or Mrs. Killair take it," Marvin answered. "Then the tables will be evenly matched when Arna comes down."

"You play, Mary," Mrs. Killair insisted.

John had been sitting in an overstuffed chair during all this, glancing

through a pile of magazines on a coffee table within reach of his arm.

When Lois came down the stairs from above he had glanced up at her and smiled. After that he had watched her covertly while appearing to look at the pages of a magazine.

As the four, Dr. Killair, Dr. Evaney's, Mary, and Lois, sat down at the card table and began to play bridge, he casually laid the magazine back on the pile and stood up. Then he walked across the soft red rug to the stairway.

No one seemed to notice his going. He disappeared above, going noiselessly, glancing back below just before disappearing, and seeming satisfied that no one had been aware of his going.

The cards were being dealt by Mary. Then the four players arranged their cards. Mary passed, and Dr. Evaney's to her left bid a spade. Dr. Killair, Mary's partner frowned deeply, then bid two diamonds.

Lois expressionlessly supported her partner and bid three spades. Mary promptly doubled the three spades.

Dr. Evaney's studied for a minute, then said four hearts. This was a signal bid that meant he had three aces in his hand.

Mrs. Killair came over behind him and looked at his hand. Dr. Killair promptly passed. Lois took it back into spades by bidding four spades. Mary again doubled.

Dr. Evaney's, thinking that Lois's four spade bid meant she had the fourth ace, smiled confidently and bid five spades. Dr. Killair doubled it this time. Lois passed and Mary redoubled.

Then Dr. Killair laid down the ace of diamonds. Dr. Evaney's looked at it and then looked surprisedly at Lois. She smiled triumphantly and laid down her hand. She had five low spades and no diamonds.

Smiling at Dr. Killair's chagrin she slid the deuce of spades out to cover his ace. Dr. Evaney's laughed.

Marvin came over and watched the play. The game progressed smoothly. One trick in clubs was lost. John slipped into the room from the kitchen without his absence having been noticed while the game was going on.

DR. EVANEYS shuffled the cards and began dealing. Mrs. Killair looked around the room and then said irritably, "Arna has no right to hold up the game by spending the evening upstairs like this. I'm going up and tell her so, too."

Looking around to see if anyone would offer opposition and finding none that did, she marched over to the stairs and went up.

John watched her go. Dr. Evaney's glanced up from the dealing and grinned at her back and called, "Give her the devil, grandmother."

Mrs. Killair looked down at him without pausing in her climb and said, "Hmpb!" Then she was out of sight on the landing.

Dr. Evaney's finished dealing and the four players were sorting their cards. George stood behind Dr. Evaney's and watched his hand. Marvin stood behind his wife, Mary, and watched her sort her hand.

The radio was softly playing a dance from some name band in Chicago at one of the hotels and Mary was quietly humming the tune as she sorted and studied her cards.

Then a hoarse, croaking, shuddering cry came from upstairs. It was like nothing human, except that it carried the recognizable tones of Mrs. Killair's voice.

Dr. Evaney's lifted and turned his head, as if doubting what he had heard and waiting for it to come again so that

he could be sure.

Lois paled and the hand that held her cards constricted so that it warped the cards. Otherwise she gave no outward sign of having heard.

Mary jumped, startled, and looked toward the stairs with her mouth open.

Marvin turned toward the stairs quickly and opened his mouth to say something.

Dr. Killair, with a muttered sound, pushed his chair back clumsily and ran across the room and up the stairs, while the others watched him, motionless.

After he disappeared, Dr. Evaney's slowly laid his cards down on the table and slid back his chair. Then he went toward the stairway, stopping at the bottom step.

Almost at once Dr. Killair's strained face appeared and his voice, cracked and strained, ordered him to come up.

Dr. Evaney's glanced back at the others, Mary, who was still sitting, with her face white and fearful; Marvin with an expression of wonder and concern on his face, standing behind Mary's chair, with a comforting hand on his wife's shoulder; Lois, who was still sitting, her face a mask of dread, her lower lip clenched in her teeth; and John who was studying his wife Lois, and had eyes for nothing else.

"The rest of you stay down here," he said crisply. Then he took the steps two at a time.

The moments hung in eternities on the four who waited motionless for someone to come down from above and tell them what it was about.

And into one of those eternal moments a soft wailing cry drifted from a great distance, from outside. It grew louder and closer until it could be recognized unmistakably as the wail of a siren.

It was still going full blast from somewhere out on the highway when

the front door burst open and four busky men in white trousers and starched white hospital coats came in.

They glanced hastily at the two men and two women, then rushed at Marvin. Before the others could move Marvin was on the floor, and the four men were struggling to get his arms in a straight-jacket.

ONE of the men had to turn his attention to John who was trying to obstruct their work. He was bolding John back when Dr. Evaney's came downstairs.

"Let them do their work, John," he said. "There's nothing you can do." His lips kept moving in an agonizing way when he stopped talking. He looked from one face to another of the group. Then he added, "Arna's been killed upstairs. Marvin—"

"No!" It was Mary's voice. In it was protest, horror, unbelief, dread that it might be true, and doubt, all mixed into a cacaphonic, discordant croaking protest.

A firm knock sounded loudly at the front door. Dr. Evaney's went over and opened it. Several men walked in. Some of them wore police uniforms and some were in business suits.

One of them said, "I see everything's under control. Where's the body?"

Dr. Evaney's motioned toward the stairs vaguely. He didn't say anything.

Two of the uniformed policemen drifted into the room and smiled in friendly comradeship of profession at the four hospital attendants. The rest filed slowly upstairs.

Mary, taking advantage of the diversion, darted to Marvin's side and tried to untie the straightjacket. Marvin's head was bowed, hiding his face. He was standing where the attendants had lifted him to his feet.

A policeman saw what Mary was try-

ing to do.

"None of that, lady," he said sternly. When she defiantly kept on he took her arm and led her to a seat. "Sit there and keep out of trouble," he admonished.

Steps sounded on the stairs and two men came down. In answer to Dr. Evaney's look one of them said, "The doctor took his wife to their bedroom. She's pretty upset."

Then he looked curiously at Marvin who sat down on a straight backed chair, a look of defiance and bitterness on his face.

"So this is the one," the detective said.

"He couldn't have done it," Lois said. "I saw Arna alive and Marvin never left this room after I saw her. He couldn't possibly have killed her!"

"Is that so?" asked the detective. "Well, we'll get all that straightened out later. Meanwhile we aren't taking any chances. Dr. Evaney's says that Marvin killed his wife. Whether he did or not we can't let a possibly mad killer loose and be responsible for what he might do. Now all of you sit down and relax. My men are upstairs taking fingerprints and examining evidence. They may find something that will determine who did it beyond question. Meanwhile keep still."

He turned his back on them and went back upstairs.

THE body was in the bathroom. It was just as Mrs. Killair had first found it; crumpled up in the recessed tub, the head pushed forward until the chin rested against the chest. The chrome plated soap dish built into the top of the faucets had slid part way into the back of the skull.

It was a horrible sight, even to the calloused eyes of the detectives. Some sharp instrument had been used freely.

The clothing had been cut off almost completely. In addition there were literally hundreds of slashes all over the body. None of them had bled much. Arna had obviously died from the blow given by the soap dish, instantly.

As Larry Thompson reached the second floor landing flashes from photo-flash bulbs darted out into the hall through the bathroom door.

A griefstricken, moaning sound came from the partly opened bedroom door across from the bathroom. That would be Mrs. Killair.

Larry stuck his head in the door.

"How's it coming?" he asked the men inside.

"Fine," the man with the camera answered. "We have several sets of fingerprints already off this plastic shower curtain."

"Are they all alike?" Larry asked.

"Not all," was the noncommittal answer. "Be through here in a minute." Another flash bulb went off. Then the photographer stepped back and folded up his camera, putting it in a case lying on the tiled floor.

Larry stepped past him and pulled the curtain to one side. His eyes coldly examined what was revealed, but he said nothing.

A knock on the door below announced the arrival of the coroner. He came clumping up the steps and down the hall.

"Where's the body? In here?" he asked when he appeared in the bathroom doorway. When no one answered he grunted and stepped in.

His eyes took in the corpse. Involuntarily he flinched, then recovered his cynical expression.

"Cause of death," he said. Then he chuckled. "Heart trouble."

"Don't crack so goddamned funny," Larry said. "Maybe you can eat the entrails of unclaimed morgue tenants

with your wheaties in the morning, but me—I like to think we are human."

"Who did it?" the coroner asked calmly, ignoring Larry's disgust.

"I don't know," Larry said. "Probably the guy downstairs in the straight-jacket. He used to be an inmate here."

"Oh," the coroner said. He looked over his shoulder and motioned the two young men standing in the hall to come in.

They wheeled a stretcher into view and everybody stepped out of the bathroom while they went in and lifted the body out of the tub.

Larry followed the coroner and his boys downstairs. He stopped the coroner as he was going out the front door.

"Can you set a definite time for the murder?" he asked.

The coroner shrugged. "Sometime within the past hour," he said. "I may be able to tell more accurately when we get samples of the stomach contents and you get all the details. Call up in a couple of hours. I'll get busy right away."

HE PULLED the door shut carefully and went down the front steps. Larry watched him thoughtfully through the window peephole in the front door. Or rather, he appeared to do so. His mind was really quite a few miles away, thinking sadly of the three aces and two tens that lay face down under his stack of chips at the table in his office, where he had put them when the game was interrupted by the emergency call from the state hospital.

He pulled his thoughts back to the present and turned to face those in the front room. His eyes rested speculatively on Marvin. Better to talk to the doctors first and find out what it was all about. Then the rest of them. After that their fingerprints and the job of trying to see if any of them had lied,

and why. He walked over to Dr. Evaney's.

"Do you know the layout of this house?" he asked.

"Yes," Dr. Evaney's said. "Of course. All the houses in this section of the hospital grounds are exactly alike."

"What I want," Larry said, "is a study or office of some kind where I can see each of you privately."

"The doctors' study will be just the thing," Dr. Evaney's answered. "This way."

He walked past the stairway into the other half of the large room that filled the front half of the house and opened a door. A room was revealed. One wall was nothing but books. The outside wall had three large windows, and a desk was pushed against the center one. The room was small, not more than eight by ten.

"This'll do," Larry said. "I might as well start with you, doctor." He went back to the foot of the stairs and called, "Oh, Joe. Come down here."

A policeman with a shorthand notebook in his hand came down at a trot. He followed Larry and Dr. Evaney's into the study and shut the door behind him.

"She was your wife?" Larry began.

Dr. Evaney's took out a cigaret before answering. His hands were perfectly steady as he held his lighter and sucked on the flame.

"Yes," he said.

"You're certain it was that boy out there in the straitjacket?" Larry prompted.

"Quite certain," Dr. Evaney's said emphatically. "Although you might say I was to blame indirectly. Both Dr. Killair and myself."

"Go ahead and tell me about it," Larry said sympathetically. "I'll interrupt if there's anything that needs

explaining."

"It all began about a year ago," Dr. Evaney's said. "I can get the exact dates if you want them. Marvin Swank—he's the murderer—was committed to the hospital. A prefrontal lobotomy was in order. Dr. Killair had been wondering what the effects of the operation were on the processes of the frontal lobe. He suggested freezing the connecting nerves instead of severing them. I agreed to do it."

"What was the object of doing that?" Larry asked. He glanced at Joe to make sure he was getting it all in shorthand.

"The object was simply this," Dr. Evaney's went on, "functionally, freezing was as good as actually cutting; but eventually the effects would wear off. Then, by Marvin's behavior, we could find out what had been going on in that isolated frontal lobe. That way we could gain very valuable data on the prefrontal lobotomy and determine whether it might be more humane to actually remove the frontal lobe rather than let it live."

Larry whistled in amazement. "So, that's it!" he exclaimed. "Something like chaining the devil and then letting him loose to see what he had been up to in his schemings."

"Something like that," Dr. Evaney's said. "Although there was more to it than that. You see, the frontal lobe contains the function of the brain generally called the super ego. Dr. Killair hoped that perhaps a year of isolation might bring about complete normalcy in the super ego, so that when the freezing wore off the patient would have recovered completely. That way he wouldn't have to go through life with an incomplete functioning of the brain."

"And instead," Larry completed the thought, "the super ego became dan-

gerous and criminal."

"It would seem so," Dr. Evaney said. "The mind is a funny thing. I don't doubt but what Marvin is completely unaware of what he did up there." Dr. Evaney had a fit of coughing. After it was over he went on. "Most probably, the unfreezing process is spasmodic. That is, the super ego suddenly took over and blocked off normal consciousness. In its maddened state, augmented by a year of brooding in its cell, cut off from all contact with the world of reality, it turned on the first person available—my wife. When the freezing bloc took over again Marvin had no memory of what his body had done. I'm quite sure he will insist he was perfectly conscious every minute he was upstairs, and that he didn't do this thing."

"I SEE," Larry said thoughtfully. "Now, I want to ask you a few questions. Purely for the records, you understand."

"Of course," Dr. Evaney said.

"Were you upstairs at any time during the evening before the body was discovered?"

"No."

"What were your movements, as nearly as you can remember?"

"When Arna and I arrived everyone else was already here," Dr. Evaney began. "I brought a bottle of rye and a bottle of ginger ale. It turned out that John Harper had brought some scotch. Also Dr. Killair had some liquor and an assortment of chasers on hand. I nominated myself official drink mixer and went out into the kitchen and mixed us all a drink."

"When did you go out into the kitchen, and how long were you there?" Larry asked.

"I don't know," Dr. Evaney replied. "It was somewhere around

eight o'clock. I was out there long enough to mix the drinks. Maybe five minutes. More probably, ten."

"Did anyone else go out with you?"

"No, they didn't," Dr. Evaney answered. "Marvin brought in his overnight bags. He took them upstairs. Arna was going up to finish making up. She always is late, and wasn't ready when we started over here. She took one of the bags from Marvin and helped him up the stairs. That was just before I went in the kitchen."

"Then what," Larry prompted.

"I got out the glasses and looked around for a corkscrew. I couldn't find one, and I had left my knife in my other trousers. I poked my head into the living room and asked if anyone had a knife. Mrs. Killair said the corkscrew was in the drawer next to the sink."

"Marvin was still upstairs?" Larry asked.

"Come to think of it," Dr. Evaney said, "he was just coming down. I noticed because he put his hand in his pocket to get his knife. He was the only one who did that. The rest just looked at me without moving—except, of course, Mrs. Killair who told me where her corkscrew was."

"Let me get this straight," Larry said. "Your wife and Marvin Swank went upstairs. Then you went into the kitchen. When you poked your head out Marvin was just coming down. How long would you estimate he was up there?"

"I have no idea," Dr. Evaney said slowly. "It certainly wasn't more than five minutes. Or was it? I don't notice the passage of time too well."

"Maybe we can estimate the time to, within a minute," Larry said. "Were Marvin and your wife out of sight yet when you went into the kitchen?"

"They were just at the top of the

stairs."

"O.K." Larry grunted his satisfaction. "Suppose we go out to the kitchen and you go through the motions of what you did there, as nearly as you can recall them. You stay here, Joe. We'll be back."

Larry and Dr. Evanays went to the kitchen. Inside, Dr. Evanays paused, waiting for instructions. Larry took out his watch and held it in the palm of his hand.

"All right," he said. "Go back to the door, but don't open it. When I say go, pretend you have just come in and are going to make those drinks."

Dr. Evanays did so. Larry watched him until he went back to the door to the other room.

"This is when I stuck my head out," Dr. Evanays said.

"Good enough," Larry said, pocketing his watch.

The two men went back to Dr. Killair's study.

"Now," Larry said, a satisfied note in his voice. "After you went back in the kitchen what did you do?"

"I mixed the drinks," Dr. Evanays said. "Then I took them into the other room. Later I went back and made some more."

"Did you go upstairs at any time?" Larry asked.

"Not until Mrs. Killair screamed when she found Arna dead," Dr. Evanays said.

"Fine," Larry said, rising. "Tell your men to bring Mr. Swank in."

Larry put his hands in his trouser pockets and whistled a mournful dirge while waiting for Marvin.

Two attendants brought him in and showed signs of intending to stay.

"That'll be all," Larry said, glancing with distaste at their brutal faces and barrell chests. "I think I can handle him if he gets violent." He winked

at Marvin when the attendants turned to go out.

AFTER they were gone Larry stood silently looking down at Marvin, who sat where the attendants had pushed him in an office chair.

Then he walked over and untied the strings that held the arms of the strait-jacket in place. Marvin looked around at him unbelievably. He offered no resistance when Larry pulled the thing off.

Then Larry pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and took out two. One he put between Marvin's unresisting lips. The other he put in his own. Then he lit both with a book match. After that he sat down, a sardonic smile on his face.

"Tell me what you did when you were upstairs, Marvin," he ordered quietly.

"Why, I don't know," Marvin said, bewildered at the turn of events.

"Try," Larry said softly.

"I took the bags upstairs," Marvin began. "Arna took one of them. She set the one she was carrying down at the top of the stairs and went to the bathroom. I took the others to the right front bedroom and came back and got the one she had left. Then I combed my hair in the dresser mirror, noticed I had forgotten to put a clean handkerchief in my pocket and opened the overnight bag and got one. After that I went back downstairs."

"How long do you think it took you?" Larry asked.

"That's hard to tell," Marvin said. "Maybe ten minutes."

"After you came downstairs did you go back up again?"

"No, I didn't," Marvin answered.

"All right," Larry said. "Now let's go upstairs and I want you to go through every motion just as nearly

as you can remember it."

He opened the door and stepped aside for Marvin to pass. Outside Dr. Evaney's half rose in surprise when he saw Marvin come out without the strait-jacket on.

"It's all right, doctor," Larry said.

He and Marvin went upstairs. At the top Larry said, "Now pretend you have the hags and have just come up. If Arna said anything to you recall it and pause if you did so when she said it. Do everything just as nearly as possible the way you did it then."

He held his watch in his hand while he watched Marvin go into the bedroom, come out, pick up an imaginary suitcase, go back to the bedroom, comb his hair in front of a mirror, start toward the door, put his hand in his hip pocket, pause, then open a suitcase that was lying on a stand at the foot of the bed, take out a handkerchief, then leave the room.

"Keep going and pause where you were when Dr. Evaney's asked for a knife," Larry said in a voice that wouldn't carry downstairs.

Marvin did so. Larry, at the top of the stairs, put his watch back in his pocket with a satisfied grunt. He reached the bottom of the steps even with Marvin, who started for Dr. Killair's office.

"That's all, Mr. Swank," Larry said. "Go sit down somewhere."

Dr. Evaney's objected.

"Aren't you going to put the jacket back?" he asked. "It's impossible to predict when his super ego will come to life again."

"There's nothing to fear," Larry said, smiling, his eyes watching everyone in the room. "He didn't do it."

"What!" Dr. Evaney's exclaimed.

Marvin turned quickly and darted a look of thanks at Larry.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"You didn't have time," Larry said noncommittally. He looked vaguely at Mary and Lois who were sitting together on a davenport. "Mrs. Swank," he said.

MARY arose. Larry motioned toward the office and waited until she had passed him, then followed her. In the office he invited her to be seated. After she sat down he slowly ground out the stub of his cigaret.

"Did you go upstairs at any time this evening, Mrs. Swank?" he asked.

"No, I didn't," she said. Her eyes were still warm with gratitude toward Larry for having exonerated Marvin.

"You're sure?" Larry insisted.

"Quite sure," Mary said calmly.

"Do you know who did go up?" Larry asked.

"Let's see," Mary said, looking at the ceiling. "Lois went up just before the game started. That was when Dr. Evaney's went out into the kitchen. In fact, he asked if Lois or I would go up and tell Arna to speed things up a bit and get down so we could start playing. Lois came back down and said that Arna would be down shortly. After that I don't believe anyone went up until Mrs. Killair went up and found Arna dead."

"Was Dr. Evaney's still in the kitchen when Lois came down?"

"No," Mary said. "He was serving the second round of drinks when she came down."

"So she was upstairs all the time he was in the kitchen?" Larry asked, idly lighting another cigaret.

"I guess so," Mary said. "Yes, he was. He was singing an accompaniment to the song that was coming over the radio. He couldn't have gone up the back stairs."

"The back stairs?" Larry asked, sitting up. "How did you know about them?"

"Oh, we've been here lots of times," Mary said sadly. "I know the house as well as my own."

"I see," Larry said. "Will you tell Lois—that's Mrs. Harper, isn't it?—to come in here?"

Mary went out and in a moment Lois entered. Her face was a dull white under the powder, and her lipstick seemed almost garish, even though it was a conservative shade.

"Sit down, Mrs. Harper," Larry said evenly, without getting up from his chair.

"Tell me what you did upstairs and what you and Arna said to each other," he said after she was seated.

"I—I . . ." Lois paused.

"Yes?" Larry said.

"I didn't see Arna at all," Lois said desperately. "To think that while I was powdering my nose in the bathroom her body was in the tub, hidden by the shower curtains!"

"Then why did you say she would be down shortly?" Larry asked, incredulity on his face.

"I don't know," Lois said, wringing her handkerchief in her hands nervously. "When I didn't see her in the bathroom I didn't know what she might be up to, so I gave her a sort of alibi if she needed one—if you get what I mean."

Larry leaned forward.

"I may as well tell you," he said slowly, "you're in rather a bad spot. By your own admission you were the last one to see Arna alive—except the murderer. Unless you yourself did it."

"Oh, hut I didn't! I couldn't!" Lois exclaimed.

"Then tell me the truth!" Larry said irritably.

"I am," Lois wailed.

"What did you think she might have been doing then?" Larry asked.

"I don't know," Lois said vaguely.

"You won't repeat this?"

"No," Larry said.

"Well," Lois said. "She and Marvin went up together. Everyone knows that the prefrontal lobotomy Marvin had impairs the moral sense. I read about it in *Life* over a year ago. It was in February in 1947, I think. Well, Arna is very good looking and all that."

SHE left off, miserably and helplessly.

Larry chuckled. Joe, with his face glued to his notebook and his fingers hurrying to catch up, snickered.

"I lied because I don't want Mary to be unhappy about anything," Lois said angrily. "If Marvin carries on he carries on. I don't know whether he does or not, hut Mary has been through enough without her finding it out if he does."

She tossed her head defiantly.

"O.K., O.K.," Larry said tolerantly.

"You thought that since she wasn't in the bathroom and wasn't downstairs she must be in the front bedroom. That it?"

Lois nodded, her nostrils flaring under the indignity of the situation.

"That will be all," Larry said, taking pity on her. "Send your husband in."

Lois marched out of the room, her back unforgiving. Almost at once John came in.

Always quiet and reserved, John's reserve seemed to encompass him like a protecting cloak now. Larry, looking at him, realized that here was at least a great poker player, whatever else he might be. The thought reminded him of the three aces and pair of tens waiting back in the office to fulfill their destiny. He frowned at the thought of how much there was to do before then, and motioned John to a chair with his cigaret, wordlessly.

Equally wordless, John sat down.

When Larry showed no inclination to begin asking questions, John let his eyes drop to his fingers, and began a critical inspection of the nails.

"Were you upstairs tonight before Mrs. Evaney's body was discovered?" Larry asked suddenly.

John shook his head and looked up, smiling. "No," he said. "Nor since then either."

"What have been your movements, so far as you can recall, since you arrived?" Larry was watching John under drooping lids. He had noticed something. The flesh under John's left eye had quivered almost imperceptibly when he had denied being upstairs. In some people that could be a sure indication of lying. In others it meant nothing but nervousness.

"I dropped the others near the door when we arrived," John began. "Then I parked my car in the vacant stall in Dr. Killair's garage. We're going to be here over the weekend, you know—or were, that is. Then I joined them and we all went in the house together. Just as we got our wraps put away in the closet under the stairs Dr. and Mrs. Evaney came in. They brought a bottle. That reminded me that I had brought one, so I went out to the car and got it. Brought the bags in with me and Marvin took them upstairs. After that I just sat around looking through old magazines, waiting for Arna to get back in the crowd so we could form the second bridge table."

He grinned at Larry and added, "Do you want me to go through the magazines and read everything I read while you time me?"

"I might—later," Larry said. "You sure you didn't go upstairs?"

John shook his head calmly, but again that almost imperceptible twitch under his left eye appeared momentarily.

"That's all for now," Larry said.

"Oh, by the way," he added as John turned toward the door. He waited until John had turned back and was facing him. Then he said softly, "So far all the evidence points toward your wife."

Larry watched the slow disintegration of John's calm reserve. He made no move to stop him when John suddenly turned and left the room. His eyes remained on the closed door. After a while, without moving his head, he asked, "Got all that, Joe?"

"Every word," Joe said.

Larry got up and went to the door. He hesitated just a fraction of a second before he opened it.

"Dr. Evaney's," he called.

When the doctor came in he showed signs of anger and determination. He started in on Larry at once.

"You're taking an awful lot on yourself in freeing Marvin," he said. "Regardless of any smart ideas you conjure up with a stop watch Marvin is the only one here who could have possibly killed my wife. Yet you set him free so that when his frontal lobe again establishes control he can murder some one else."

"If he does, won't that prove something?" Larry asked dryly.

"If he does you should hang for it, because *he's* not responsible," Dr. Evaney said hotly.

"Calm yourself, doctor," Larry said soothingly. "I want you to tell me everything you can remember about when you went upstairs."

"I didn't—oh, you mean after Mrs. Killair found Arna," Dr. Evaney said. "Well, Mrs. Killair finally got so thoroughly disgusted with what she thought was Arna's selfishness in staying upstairs, that she decided to go up and tell her off. When she screamed Dr. Killair rushed upstairs as fast as

he could go. Then—"

"Had either the doctor or his wife been upstairs prior to that time?" Larry interrupted.

"I don't think so," Dr. Evanays said. "Of course I went out to mix the drinks a couple of times as you know. But I don't think they went up during those times, and I know they didn't when I was in the room."

"How do you know? Is that the sort of thing you ordinarily notice?"

"Of course not," Dr. Evanays said. "But with Arna supposedly monopolizing the bathroom—"

"I see," Larry said. "Now tell me what you did from the time you reached the top of the stairs."

"I saw Dr. Killair's legs sticking out of the bathroom doorway. He was on his knees. Mrs. Killair had fainted. I pulled the doctor out of the way and picked her up and carried her in onto the bed. Then I went back to see what had caused all the excitement. Arna was there—in the tub."

Dr. Evanays covered his face with his hands. Larry was respectfully silent for a minute. Then he said softly, "Were the shower curtains pulled back?"

Dr. Evanays emitted a shuddering sigh and lowered his hands. Larry was holding a pack of cigarets toward him. He took one gratefully and sucked deeply on it after it was lit before answering.

"Yes, they were," he replied. "I don't remember pulling them back. I may have hung onto them. I don't remember whether I did or not."

"You were the one that called us?"

"Yes, from the phone in the doctor's bedroom."

"One more thing," Larry said. "How far is your house from here?"

"Mine is the one next door," Dr. Evanays answered.

"I would like to move everyone to your house for the rest of the night," Larry said.

"I'll agree to that if you lock Marvin up," Dr. Evanays said. "I'm not going to have him running loose. I won't be responsible for the consequences."

"You needn't worry," Larry said. "There will be plenty of men posted through the house so that no one can do another murder."

"In that case," Dr. Evanays gave in, "O.K."

"Go out to the car and get the fingerprint stuff, Joe," Larry said.

After Joe went out he said to Dr. Evanays, "We're going to take everybody's fingerprints. Then all of you will go over to your place."

Larry had a thoughtful frown on his face during the fingerprinting of everybody. When it was over and they were ready to go next door Larry stopped Marvin at the door and said, "Would you like to stay over here and help me a little?"

Marvin looked at his wife. She nodded her head.

"I'd be glad to," Marvin said.

AFTER they had gone Larry went back into the office and called for a plumber. Then he called the coroner. Shortly after, the photographer came back from town with the finished pictures he had taken of fingerprints in the bathroom.

Marvin watched them with a great deal of interest. He had always had a Sherlock Holmes concept of detectives. It was a surprise to see real detectives doing their detecting like ordinary men. They might have been auditors in a bank, workers in a factory, and students in a college laboratory. The last thing they looked like was men gathering data which might point out the real murderer.

"You know, don't you," Larry shot at him out of a clear sky, "that whoever did this planned for you to take the rap?"

"Huh?" Marvin grunted in surprise.

"Certainly," Larry said. "That's the reason for the senseless slashing of the body after it was dead. Do you have a jack knife on you?"

"Yes," Marvin said, reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a knife and extended it toward Larry. Larry took it and opened the blades, looking closely into the cracks and crevices. Then he handed it to one of the men who put it in an envelope.

After a while Larry stood up, put his hands in his pockets, and sauntered into the living room. Marvin followed him. When they were alone Larry struck up a conversation about women. This gradually led to a discussion of Lois and Arna, and Larry asked idly if Marvin had been aware of either of them falling for him.

"Not that I know of," Marvin answered. "Sometimes Lois looks at me in a way that makes me uncomfortable, but as for her falling in love with me—it had never entered my mind."

"How about Arna?" Larry asked.

"Oh," Marvin laughed uncomfortably, "I guess she was a flirt all right. Several times when no one else was around she put her arms around my neck and pushed her body against mine as close as she could and rubbed her cheek against mine. Then she would lean her head back and look at me in a way that it was pretty hard to resist."

"Did you resist?" Larry asked with a chuckle.

Marvin shuddered.

"Once I didn't resist," he said. "I kissed her."

"That all?" Larry invited.

"That was enough," Marvin said. There were light beads of perspiration

on his forehead now. "She clung to me like glue. I heard someone coming and had to practically break her arms to get free before we were discovered."

"Did you kiss her this evening when she went upstairs with you?" Larry asked.

"No," Marvin hesitated a long time before he said it.

"You act like you wanted to say something," Larry said.

"When we got to the top of the stairs she put her arm around my neck. I had the suitcases, you know. Then she whispered in my ear that she would be sitting in the back seat of John Harper's car at four o'clock this morning. That's all she said. Then she let go of me and went down the hall."

"Hm," Larry murmured. "Her meaning was plain enough, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Marvin said uncomfortably.

"Did you ever have any—uh, illicit relations with her?" Larry asked.

"No!" Marvin exclaimed. "After that one kiss, months ago, I was very careful never to be alone with her."

"That time you were telling about—you said you heard someone coming. Who was it?"

"Oh, that was when we were over at Evaney's one weekend," Marvin said.

"It was Dr. Evaney's himself."

"Do you think he suspected what had been going on just before he came in?"

"I don't think so," Marvin answered slowly. "Certainly, he has never been less than friendly toward me. I would say that if he guessed anything it didn't bother him."

"About this evening," Larry said, "you didn't include that little exchange with Arna when you went over your actions upstairs. About how long did you and Arna pause at the top of the stairs?"

"There was no pause, really," Marvin answered. "A fraction of a second, more or less."

THE phone rang. Larry went into the study to answer it. He was there only a minute, then came back.

"About your knife," he said, changing the subject. "Did you loan it to anyone recently? Not this evening, but sometime in the past couple of weeks."

"I don't remember," Marvin began. "Let's see. Nope. Can't remember anyone borrowing it at all. They may have, though. If they did it's slipped my mind."

"Well, try to recall if anyone did," Larry said. "It may be important." He pulled out his watch. It was a quarter to eleven.

"I'm hungry," Marvin said. "I don't think Mrs. Killair would mind if I fixed some coffee and sandwiches. Is it O.K. with you?"

"Go ahead," Larry said. "I'll be there later. I want to talk to the doctor."

He went up and knocked softly on the door to the master bedroom. After a moment there were soft footsteps on the other side, and Dr. Killair's face appeared through the partly opened door.

"What do you want?" he asked dully.

"I just want to know if everything's all right, doctor," Larry said softly. "I won't need to question you or your wife at all."

"I'm glad of that," Dr. Killair said gratefully. "Martha's heart is rather bad, and this hasn't been good for her."

"Would you like some coffee?" Larry asked. "Marvin is making some."

"Marvin?" Dr. Killair asked incredulously. "I thought he was in a straitjacket. Dr. Evanays and I both decided that would be safest."

"Marvin isn't the murderer," Larry whispered.

"Then who is?" Dr. Killair was puzzled.

Larry put his mouth close to Dr. Killair's ear and whispered rapidly.

"No!" Dr. Killair exclaimed. He glanced over his shoulder into the bedroom. "We'd better go down to my study," he said. He came out and closed the door softly behind him.

When the two men were in the study Larry closed the door.

"I can't believe it," Dr. Killair exclaimed. "It's too farfetched."

"Murder is always farfetched," Larry said dryly.

"I know," Dr. Killair said, sinking weakly into the chair at his desk.

"I would like you to answer some questions, Dr. Killair," Larry said. "You don't have to answer them, but if you do it will save us a lot of work when things open up in the morning. We can get the answers to every question I'm going to ask you from public records."

"All right," Dr. Killair said. "What are they?"

"Was Arna ever a patient at the hospital?" Larry asked slowly.

"I was afraid you would think of that," Dr. Killair said. "Yes, she was. I may as well tell you the whole thing. She was already here as a patient when Dr. Evanays first joined our staff five years ago. He joined as a shock doctor, and met her in the routine of his work. He wasn't the first doctor in a state hospital to cure and marry a patient. There are at least a hundred similar cases in this country."

"When war broke out he expected to have to go at any minute. He and Arna got married just two months before the army took him. Arna stayed on in his resident house for a time, then took an apartment in town. We knew, of course, that she was man crazy. It was in her record when she was committed by her parents. When Dr. Evanays came back after the war he was still an army doctor. He had merely been assigned to this hospital at his and my request."

He brought Arna back from town. For several months she kept pretty much to herself, never showing her face outside the house. When my wife would go over to call on her she wouldn't answer the door.

"I asked George about it—Dr. Evanys—and he laughed it off and said to give her time. He—"

"Then that must have been when—?" Larry cut in.

"YES, of course." Dr. Killair got up and began pacing on the worn carpet. "He undoubtedly found out she had been running with everything with pants on, and he loved her in his way. I don't think it really meant much one way or another whether she loved him or not. She was his, and he was a surgeon. He thought he knew how to cure her. He must have been mad. But how could he have killed her? He never went upstairs."

"He did go upstairs," Larry said, "but I couldn't prove it in a court of law. Not with the evidence I have so far. As a matter of fact, I can't see myself how he could have gone upstairs."

A sudden inspiration hit Larry between the eyes. "You're a psychiatrist," he exclaimed. "Suppose I tell you everything we've found out so far. Maybe you can see something I've missed."

At Dr. Killair's tired nod of agreement Larry began. He listened without comment or expression until Larry stopped talking, and Larry didn't omit a single thing. After he finished Dr. Killair was silent for several minutes.

"You certainly were thorough," he finally said. "You missed only two things. One because nobody told you and you didn't ask, and the other because you aren't a psychiatrist." His voice sounded flat, as if his spirit were dead.

"Then we can prove Dr. Evanys did it?" Larry asked eagerly.

"I didn't say that—"

A knock at the study door interrupted what Dr. Killair had been going to say.

"Come in," Larry said curtly.

The door opened. Framed in the opening was one of Larry's men. He wore a broad grin.

"I've cracked the case, chief," he said.

"Oh?" Larry said, half annoyed.

The man came in, followed by John Harper, whose face and eyes were a mask of mental suffering. The man pointed his thumb toward John.

"He did it," he said. "He just confessed."

"Come in. Come in," Larry said. "Tell us about it."

The two men entered. Larry stood up and closed the door, motioning John to be seated.

"Tell us about it," Larry repeated.

"I waited until everybody was intent on the card game," John began. "Then I slipped up and killed her. I went down the back stairs and came out through the kitchen. No one noticed I had been gone."

Larry looked questioningly at Dr. Killair. The doctor shook his head imperceptibly.

"That won't work, Mr. Harper," Larry said. "You weren't upstairs at any time."

"I tell you I was," John insisted.

"No, you weren't," Larry said calmly. "But give us your story anyway." He grinned humorously.

"Don't do it, John," Dr. Killair said quickly. "Lois didn't do it."

John had opened his mouth to speak. He left it hanging open as he turned slowly toward Dr. Killair, the import of the words sinking in slowly.

"She didn't?" he asked stupidly. A

thought struck him. Fear came into his eyes. "You can't prove I was upstairs," he said hastily. "I was careful not to touch the shower curtains with my finger tips."

"Let us give you a piece of advice," Larry said dryly. "Don't ever commit a murder. You aren't the type that could get away with it. If we didn't already know who did it I would pounce on that slip of yours and arrest you for the murder."

"Then you know who did it?" John asked.

Larry nodded grimly.

"We can't prove it, but we know it was her husband."

"But he wasn't upstairs all evening until Mrs. Killair found her!" John exclaimed.

"He was," Larry said, "but we don't know when or how."

"Hmm," John said thoughtfully. He had recovered his mental balance now.

"I was saying," Dr. Killair said patiently, "that although we can't prove it in a court of law, I think if we confront him with the certainty that we know he did it he will confess."

"Maybe," Larry said. "We would stand a better chance if we knew when he did it. I timed him in the kitchen, and then I timed Marvin upstairs. Their actions worked out almost to the second. They both had to be telling the truth."

There was a quick knock on the door and then Marvin stuck his head in.

"COFFEE'S ready," he said. "Oh, hello, John. I thought you were over with the others."

"Let's drink the coffee," Larry said quickly, walking toward the door.

The men went into the kitchen, Larry in the lead. It was the first time he had been in there.

When he walked in his eyes took in

the details of the kitchen, then widened in surprise. He turned hastily and looked through the swinging door as each man held it open.

"Marvin," he said slowly.

"Yes," Marvin answered.

"Were you at the foot of the stairs when Dr. Evanays asked for a knife?"

"Yes," Marvin said. "Why?"

"Go out there now and stand just the way you were then."

Puzzled, Marvin did as he was told. Larry stood in the partly opened doorway.

"How much of the kitchen did you notice?" he asked.

"Nearly all of it," Marvin said.

"Good," Larry sighed with relief. "Now look into the kitchen and carefully recall everything you saw."

"Well," Marvin said. His eyes widened as they fastened on something in the kitchen.

"What is it, Marvin?" Larry asked impatiently.

"The can opener!" Marvin exclaimed.

Larry looked around. The can opener with its corkscrew sticking out lay on the drainboard by the sink.

"It's exactly where it was when Dr. Evanays was standing in the door," Marvin said slowly. "He had already used it."

"Right," Larry said. His eyes held a light of triumph. He pulled out his watch and looked at it. It was twelve-thirty.

Ten minutes later Dr. Evanays entered the kitchen, flanked by two detectives, his wrists held together with handcuffs.

"What's the meaning of this?" he exclaimed.

"Can't you think of anything more original than that?" Larry asked lightly. "You're under arrest for the murder of your wife. And anything

you say may be used against you."

He sipped some coffee with an unconcern that was calculated to enrage the doctor. Then his eyes hardened.

"I might have pitied you if you had just killed that poor, unbalanced wife of yours," he said coldly. "But when you tried to pin it on an innocent man, and cold-bloodedly laid your plans a year ago, I don't have any more pity for you than I would for a snake."

"You're mad," Dr. Evanays croaked. "I wasn't upstairs all evening. I couldn't possibly have killed Arna."

"Oh, but you were," Larry said. "Let me tell you just what you did. When you first came out into the kitchen Arna and Marvin were going upstairs. You rushed like mad and made up the drinks. Then you peeked through the door until you saw Marvin come down, which was right away.

"You poked your head out and asked for a knife. You didn't want one, least of all Marvin's. You had already made that a damning piece of evidence by borrowing it at some other time and salting a little of your wife's blood in it, where the police laboratory could find it when the time came. You wanted his knife on him. What you wanted was to create the impression that the drinks weren't made yet. Then you could rush up and kill your wife and everyone would think that time had been occupied in making the drinks."

"And he asked someone to turn on the radio," Dr. Killair interrupted. "That covered any noise he made."

"You can't prove a word of that," Dr. Evanays said hoarsely.

"We can," Larry said. "Marvin saw the can opener laying on the drain-board through the door while you were being told about it by Mrs. Killair."

"That's absurd," Dr. Evanays said. "Marvin did it, and he's lying to pin it on me. I told you about that opera-

tion. You'll regret this when his super ego runs amuck again and kills someone else."

Dr. Killair cleared his throat loudly.

"THAT'S where you made your biggest mistake, doctor," he said calmly. "I think when we talked about the operation you were to perform on Marvin a year ago you first got the idea for killing your wife and having it laid at the door of a person who could not be punished for it. Diabolical though that plan obviously is, I have to admire you for it. You thought that Marvin would be convicted, that we would confess what we had done, and then remedy our error and perform the operation that should have been performed in the first place. Then the death of your wife would have been just a regrettable mistake that could be laid at the altar of medical progress. You would be a hero and a martyr instead of a convicted murderer."

"You didn't want your plans to slip up, so you really performed a proper prefrontal lobotomy, instead of the freezing of connecting nerves as we planned and you claimed. You knew that there would never be any way to prove otherwise, so you thought. After Marvin's conviction you could go through the motions of the operation, or if someone else performed it, he would not know that the connecting nerves were already severed."

"You can prove that?" Dr. Evanays said mockingly.

"I can give my expert opinion from the witness stand," Dr. Killair said bitterly. "You didn't inquire too closely into Marvin's profession. You knew that he was an assistant credit manager for a huge corporation, but you forgot what that means. You hinted to your wife that he would be a pushover, because the operation cut off his con-

science, and he no longer was governed by what is right and wrong. You counted on their being compromised, but neglected to realize that as a credit manager Marvin is predominantly controlled by reason and intellect, rather than by moral sense. It is my expert opinion that if Marvin's conscience were not with him, he would have overridden caution, because your wife was very attractive. He would have had to confess under the grueling the police would have given him that he had been having relations with your wife, as he probably would have. With his mind subject only to reason he resisted her."

"Aside from all that, doctor," Larry said dryly, "we found the knife that actually did the slashing, and the rubber gloves the doctor used. The plumber found them in the gooseneck of the toilet. Moreover there was a nice set of your fingerprints on the underside of the toilet seat that you left when you lowered it in your haste to get back downstairs."

"That's a lie," Dr. Evanays said. "There couldn't have been any prints."

"Oh no?" Larry grinned at the doctor tauntingly.

Without warning Dr. Evanays leaped at Larry and wrapped his fingers around his throat. Larry's arms moved in short, pistonlike arcs against the doctor's stomach. He grunted and turned a sickly shade of yellow as he doubled up and sank to the floor.

IT WAS half an hour later. Dr. Evanays had been taken away and Mary and Lois had come over to join the men in the kitchen. Most of the police had gone. Only Larry and two others were left.

In a lull in the conversation Larry spoke up.

"One thing still puzzles me," he said. Everybody looked at him as he

fastened his eyes on Lois. She felt his gaze, and her hand, bolding the cup to her lips, trembled.

"Your prints were on the shower curtain, Mrs. Harper. You undoubtedly pulled that curtain aside and saw the body in the tub. Yet you came downstairs and said that Arna would be down shortly. Why?"

"Do I have to answer that, now that it's all over?" Lois asked pathetically.

"Confession is good for the soul," Dr. Killair said softly.

"Not always," Lois pouted. "But it won't do any harm to tell you, I guess. I thought Marvin had done it, and he and Mary are so happy together that I would sooner take the blame myself than spoil their happiness. Anyway, I didn't blame him if he did do it. She was a minx and I knew she was making a nuisance of herself."

"What a crowd!" Larry laughed. "You give Marvin an alibi and your husband comes over panting to confess the deed because he thinks you are the only one who could have done it. He went up after you did and found the body and thought you had killed Arna."

"Did you, John?" Lois asked.

"He did," Larry said disgustedly. "There the body lay. . . People walked in in droves and looked at it and then went on like nothing was wrong." He chuckled. "I wonder what Dr. Evanays thought when you calmly came downstairs and said Arna would be down in a minute."

"I'll bet he felt sick," Lois said. Then she turned to her husband. "Oh, John," she said, throwing herself into his arms, "I never knew you loved me so."

"See you at the inquest," Larry said, grinning broadly. "So long."

WHEN the front door slammed he was already sliding behind the

wheel of his car. The poker hand still lay under his chips downtown in the office. It had a destiny to fulfill.

Back in the house Marvin had turned to Dr. Killair as soon as Larry was gone.

"What was all this about a different kind of operation that you were talking about?" he asked.

"I'll tell you, Marvin," Dr. Killair said. He explained carefully his ideas and speculations about the possible effects of the cutting off of the frontal lobe from all contact with the powers of expression.

"What is the soul?" he said. "Science goes on the assumption that it is a product of the imagination—superstition. Whether it is or not—if it exists, it must lie near the seat of conscience, the seat of knowledge of good and evil. It would be a very poor cure for insanity to destroy the fruit in order to mend a blemish on the husk, or to put a cellophane wrapper around the fruit and let it rot through and through while the rind presents a flawless surface. In your case, Marvin, what's been done can't be undone. But by the powers above I intend to find out some day what goes on in the severed frontal lobe if I have to perform the operation on somebody myself!" He looked around at the faces of his rapt audience fiercely.

Lois, pretending fright, threw her arms around John's neck.

"Don't let him get me, John," she cried in mock alarm.

Mary, following suit, jumped into Marvin's arms and cried, "Me neither!"

Dr. Killair looked at them, frowning. "Oh, now," he said, "You know it's too late to try anything like that tonight."

"But tomorrow?" Marvin suggested with a smile.

"Tomorrow?" Dr. Killair said vaguely. "By George, there is a tomorrow, isn't there! And we are going to the lake aren't we? In spite of what's happened?" He glanced pathetically from one to another of them.

"Of course," Lois said quickly. "That is, if Martha feels up to it."

"Oh, she will. She will," Dr. Killair said, rising and going toward the door. "I gave her a sleeping tablet and she'll wake up in the morning raring to go."

At the door he turned to give Marvin an encouraging smile. His eyes, in unhurried friendliness, touched Marvin's features idly, settled toward Marvin's eyes, and locked.

"Hang on! Don't let go!"

Unseen feet pulled by black night—swirling in blackness. Tired hands grasping nothingness and hanging on.

"A pigeon in a dark lair at midnight."

"Words again! It's a trap to pull me loose!"

"I killed him. I'll kill all of you!"

"Faces again. But they aren't masked in white. They aren't even—HER face. I killed—"

"Stop LOOKING at me or I'll have to let go."

"Let go let go let—ga. NO! Nanononona. I won't let go."

Swirling, pulling.

Slipping! Slip—

Peuple. Still. Not swirling. They KNOW.

KILL! KILL! KILL!

Black swirling night—and black wings beating. Devils in flight—and planets retreating, grinding.

"I am Marvin Swank."

"Well, see you in the morning, Marvin," Dr. Killair said pleasantly. "Good night."



THE MAGIC CIRCLE



By WILLIAM KAIRNEY



THERE is a "mystery spot" near Santa Cruz, California where everything seems to be just a bit "wacky." A compass does not act properly, birds never come near the place, and people visiting this place say that they feel depressed. It is a one hundred and fifty-foot circle where some people claim that the gravity is suspended. Others believe that a huge meteor is buried in the earth and exerts a greater magnetic pull than that of the earth. Scientists say that the area is full of carbon dioxide. People walking there appear to be leaning forward. If you toss a stone in the air it seems to go off at a slant. A house that is built on the spot is tilted off to one side. Two people of different heights can stand on a level board and when they look at each other the taller one will look much shorter than the short one.

The carbon dioxide in this area probably seeps

out of the ground. This gas in the air explains the feeling of dizziness and the shortness of breath that people are troubled with when visiting this magic circle. This also explains the absence of birds. Birds require even more oxygen than humans and cannot live where there is much carbon dioxide. But it is a little harder to explain why people walk at strange angles, and balls appear to roll up hill. Perhaps it is a matter of light refraction. When light passes from one kind of air to another, it is bent, and any object viewed under such circumstances will be off-focus and appear to be longer or shorter than it really is. Even though science has explained this mystery spot, it has not detracted from its fascination, for tourists still flock to this "magic circle" to get a thrill out of its strangeness.

* * *

EARLY WINGS



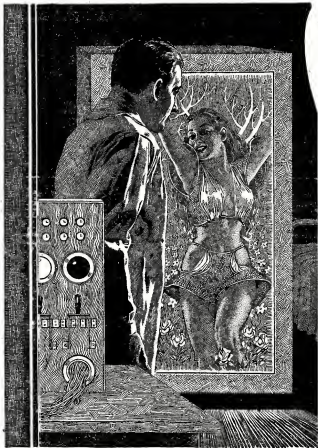
By LESLIE PHELPS



WITH the realization of airplanes with a wingspread of hundreds of feet and so monstrous it is almost unbelievable it will fly, little consideration is given to the actual miracle of the heavier than air flying machine. True, air travel is just coming into its own but the striving for machines that would leave the ground and its history is as old as centuries. The basic power of the air was recognized long before the airplane was devised. Essentially, the miracle of flying rests with the kinetic energy of the air working to raise an object from the ground. This force is truly remarkable, if one has ever seen an angry sea with tremendous waves caused by the pressure of the air on the surface.

Perhaps the most famous of the early investigators of aircraft was Da Vinci. This noted

scientist, artist and inventor became interested in flight when prompted by his followers to produce such a machine that would carry them above the city. For many months he studied the flight tactics of the birds in the vicinity and confidently thought he had the secret. His early models of flying craft much resembled the structure of the birds. In fact, his first endeavor consisted of a man leaping from a height of 50 feet, with wings patterned much like a bird's, to the ground. Of course, the venture proved disastrous. The important lesson learned was that the wings must be rigidly attached to the body of the craft. He devised several models following that occurrence. These, and models constructed by later pioneers, are still intact and can be seen in Science Museum at South Kensington, London.



A PLACE LIKE EDEN

By H. B. Hickey

The professor had built a strange machine that reached into another world.

The problem was—could he also reach it?

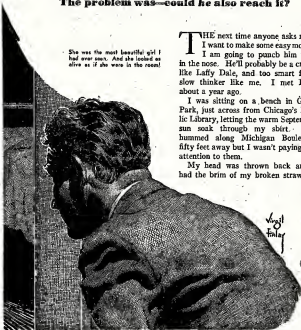
She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. And she looked as alive as if she were in the room!

THE next time anyone asks me if I want to make some easy money, I am going to punch him right in the nose. He'll probably be a crook, like Laffy Dale, and too smart for a slow thinker like me. I met Laffy about a year ago.

I was sitting on a bench in Grant Park, just across from Chicago's Public Library, letting the warm September sun soak through my shirt. Cars hummed along Michigan Boulevard fifty feet away but I wasn't paying any attention to them.

My head was thrown back and I had the brim of my broken straw hat

Virgil Finlay



tipped down over my eyes. For a long time I didn't move a muscle. Then some pigeons came waddling around, making their funny gurring sound, and I stamped my feet and shoed them away.

"Don't you like pigeons?" someone asked.

"No!"

I tipped my hat back and sat up straight and stuck my chin out, ready for an argument. There are plenty of people who think they are nature lovers because they throw an occasional peanut to a pigeon. And if you say you don't like pigeons they give you a look that says you are at very least a cad.

But I could see right away that I wasn't going to have any trouble. The fellow who had asked the question was sitting at the other end of the bench. He was young, slender, with an easy smile on his face. He wore a gray plaid suit, a blue shirt and red tie, and he had one leg crossed over the other so I could see his silk socks, also blue with a red hock.

"They remind me of a school teacher I had when I was a kid," I said, feeling a little embarrassed because it was plain the young fellow hadn't meant anything wrong.

"Besides, I read somewhere they carry disease."

He threw back his head and laughed but he wasn't laughing at me. He was a nice looking fellow, all right. His teeth were white and even and he sounded like he enjoyed life.

"You're the last person I'd pick to be afraid of disease," he said.

"I never been sick a day in my life."

He nodded his head and slid down the bench and took out a pack of cigarettes and shook it at me. I took one and let him light it with a silver cigarette lighter he got out of his

pocket. We each had a couple of deep drags.

"You look healthy, all right," he said finally.

"You can say that again."

The khaki shirt I was wearing was cut off above the elbows and I made a muscle so the flag I've got tattooed there wiggled. I had that flag put there when I was in Honolulu, in the navy, and sometimes for kids I'll make it wave like it was in a breeze.

"My name is Lafayette Dale," the young fellow said suddenly. "Everybody calls me Laffy."

"My name is Bill Peters."

WE SHOOK hands and I put on a little pressure. His grip wasn't very good. When I let go he shook his head and sat there and rubbed his right hand.

"You're pretty strong."

"You can say that again," I said.

He sat up as though he'd thought of something all of a sudden and he squinted at me, sizing me up. He must have liked what he saw because he bobbed his head.

"Kind of down on your luck, aren't you?"

"Me?" I said. "I'm the mayor of Chicago. Can't you tell?"

"I thought the mayor had white hair."

"Sure. But this is my day off."

He laughed at that and slapped me on the back. It didn't take a detective to see I was broke. My khaki wash pants were clean but ragged, and there wasn't enough left of my shirt collar to turn, if I'd had anyone who wanted to turn it.

"As a matter of fact," I told him, "I've been taking a tour of the country. I've been all over the world and I wanted to see America. Now that I've seen it I'm going back to Minne-

sota to settle down and go to work."

"Oh, I knew you weren't a bum."

"You can say that again."

"Listen," he said, sliding down close to me, "if you're looking for a way to make some easy money maybe I can help you."

I'd heard of such a thing as easy money but never thought any would come my way. I sat up a little straighter. For the first time I noticed how hard and bright and shiny Laffy's eyes were. I got a certain feeling.

A few years back, in a place called Pearl Harbor, I was about to step into the launch that would take me back to my ship, the *Arizona*, when I got a funny feeling and decided to stay ashore a while longer. This time I shook off the quiver in my stomach.

"I'm listening," I said. "But I'll tell you right now I won't go for any crooked stuff."

"Nothing like that," Laffy assured me. His voice got confidential. "The fact is, you'll be helping to right a wrong. Somebody played me a dirty trick and I want to see justice done."

"Go on," I said. "I don't like the sound of this, though."

"Wait. All I want you to do is to help me get evidence I can turn over to the police."

Well, that sounded better. As long as I wouldn't be doing anything that would get me in trouble with the law, I didn't mind. According to Laffy, I would even be working with the police. So it was all right.

"I'll tell you about it while we ride along," Laffy said.

I followed him across the grass to the boulevard and he hailed a cab. We got in and Laffy gave the driver an address on the south side of the city. Laffy didn't do any talking until we were out of the heavy traffic. I leaned back and waited.

"There were three of us working on something together," he said at last. "Two of us put up the money and the third fellow was supposed to do the actual work." He was experimenting on something new. Well, the payoff is that this third fellow claims the experiments didn't turn out and he calls off the deal.

"My friend and I figure we've been cheated. But we can't prove a thing. So it's no use going to court."

"That's pretty rotten," I said.

"Sure. But we figure if we can get actual proof that'll be different. Then the law will do our fighting for us."

"That's smart," I agreed.

I had to hand it to him. If anyone ever cheated me I would have smacked him around plenty. But where would that get me? Laffy was smart.

"Where do I fit in?" I asked.

He didn't answer that right away. I had to wait until we got to where we were going. It was a small hotel, clean but not the kind rich people live in. Laffy and I went through the empty lobby and took the elevator up to the fifth floor. His partner was waiting in their room.

I DIDN'T like the looks of this guy the minute I saw him. He was short, ratty looking, with greasy blond hair and he was wearing a green suit with white stripes. He gave me the once-over out of cold fish-eyes.

"This is my partner, Alec Welsher. Alec, this is Bill Peters."

Welsher didn't even offer to shake hands. He was cleaning his nails with a knife that had a six inch blade. All of a sudden he snapped the blade shut and dropped the knife into his pocket.

"So what?" he said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Bill is going to help us get the evidence on that crook Barnard."

"Huh?"

"Sure," Laffy said, talking real fast. "The way I figure, Barnard knows us too well for us to ever get the dope on him. But he doesn't know Bill. Maybe Bill can get a job working for him."

"Barnard's already got someone working for him."

"I know that. But maybe he can use another man. The one he's got is pretty old. Who knows, something might even happen to the old guy."

"I never thought of that," Welsber said. "You're a bright boy, Laffy."

"So far I don't bear a word about money," I cut in.

"Ha ha," Laffy said. "You're sure a card. Ain't he, Alec?"

"He sure is."

"Don't worry about a thing, Bill. Here's what I figure to do. It doesn't matter what Barnard pays you. Take any salary. Alec and I will give you a hundred and fifty dollars a week besides. That's pretty good, isn't it?"

"You can say that again," I said. "Now, how about an advance so I can get a room for tonight?"

"You don't need an advance," Laffy said quickly. "Why not stay here with me and Alec? Plenty of room."

I SLEPT on the floor, Laffy in the bed and Alec on the couch. It seemed kind of strange to me but they said there wasn't any place I could have got a room nearby. About eight o'clock they went out and didn't come back until after midnight. I didn't ask but they told me they'd been to see a friend who'd had an accident.

First thing after it got light in the morning Laffy woke up and wrote down the professor's address. He gave me some money for breakfast, which I had in a little one-arm around the corner from the hotel.

"Watch your step," he warned me

before I left. "Barnard acts innocent, but he's sharp as a razor. Don't let him find out you're spying on him."

Barnard lived in an old limestone house a mile or so south of Laffy's hotel. The card pasted next to the bell said the professor's first name was Andrew. I expected to see an old man answer the bell and was surprised when a young fellow in a dressing gown opened the door.

His eyes were drowsy and his brown hair was tousled. He ran a hand over a face that could have stood lots of sunshine.

"I'd like to see Professor Barnard," I said.

"I'm Barnard," he answered. He stretched and yawned, not acting mad because I'd got him out of bed. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for work. Maybe you could use a handyman."

"Sorry. Already have one."

There goes my easy money, I thought. I turned around and started down the stairs and was almost on the sidewalk when Barnard called me back.

"Just a moment, please."

I turned and climbed to the top again.

"I should have said I had a man," he told me. "I'm still so sleepy I forgot. He was injured last night by a hit-and-run driver and won't be able to work for a long time, if ever. So I do need someone."

"I'm clean, honest and my price is reasonable," I said. "Also, hard work doesn't scare me."

He grinned and waved me to come into the house. I followed him down a hall past a stairway that led to the second floor and into a room lined with bookshelves. He told me to sit down and I picked a leather chair.

"The work isn't very hard," he said. "You'll have to keep the place clean

and tend the furnace later, when it gets cold. Except on the rare occasions when I'm called away you may have all evenings off. By the way, can you cook?"

"Nothing fancy, but enough to get by: steaks, stews, stuff like that. And I make good coffee."

"That last has convinced me," he smiled. "You can start now by making breakfast."

We both got up and he showed me where the kitchen was. A woman's touch was missing but it had been kept clean, and there were plenty of provisions. I couldn't help smacking my lips when I saw the steaks in the freezing compartment of the refrigerator.

Barnard looked at me. He was about my height, a little over six feet, but not very broad. His blue eyes were dreamy, even with the sleep rubbed out. He didn't look like the kind to cheat anyone but I told myself looks were deceptive.

AFTER breakfast he went upstairs and didn't come down until I yelled up that it was time for lunch. Then he went up again until I called him for dinner. I had the feeling that if I hadn't called him he would have forgotten to eat.

That first day I stayed on the first floor, taking it slow and easy but keeping my eyes open. There was nothing special to see. The only unusual thing was that all the windows were burglar-proof and wired to an alarm.

After I'd washed the dishes and stacked them away I got a key from Barnard and went out. I had told Laffy I would meet him if it was at all possible. He was waiting for me at a secret corner.

"Get the job, Bill?"

"Yeah," I said. "Barnard's man was hurt in an accident yesterday."

"It's an ill wind, you know," Laffy grinned. "Find anything?"

"Not yet. I don't want to act too snoopy."

"That's right. But don't take too much time."

I said I would do my best and we arranged to meet the next evening at the same corner. For a guy who had waited so long it seemed Laffy was in an awful hurry. Also, I'd noticed something queer about him. He was wearing the same outfit as the day before.

While I walked back to Barnard's house I thought about things. In general I am not too much on thinking but I couldn't help wondering why Laffy hadn't gone to a regular detective agency. Well, he hadn't asked me to do anything dishonest. And for just a little odd work my pay was going to be good.

I found Barnard awake and in the library when I came in. He had a thick book on his lap and I sneaked a glance at it. Nothing but numbers and a lot of chicken tracks which didn't mean a thing to me. He caught me peeking but wasn't sore.

"Interested in quantum mechanics?" he asked.

"Most any kind," I told him. "I worked on diesels in the Navy but I'm pretty handy all around. I can fix a radio or if something went wrong with the flush box in the bathroom I could fix that too."

Something struck him funny and he threw his head back and laughed. He was quick with an absent minded smile but this was the first time he'd really laughed. He seemed like a nice guy. Sure, I thought. Otherwise he'd never have fooled Laffy and Welsher.

"Just what are you a professor of?" I asked.

"Nothing, now. I was in the depart-

ment of nuclear physics at the university here."

"Oh, you were one of those guys." A couple of years ago a guy like me wouldn't have known what kind of a drug that was.

"Yes, I was one of them," he said. He closed his book with a bang. "I'm sorry now. But it's a little too late, isn't it?"

"I guess so," I said, not knowing what he meant.

We said good night after that and he went upstairs and I went to sleep in a bedroom on the first floor after I'd checked all the windows and doors to make sure they were locked tight. There seemed to be a lot of humming going on upstairs, like motors running, but I slept well.

I was up early, without an alarm clock, and I got breakfast going. Barnard came in just as I was finishing my coffee. He looked like he hadn't slept much. I got up and made him some juice and toast and eggs and he ate them while he thought about something else.

"Before you do anything else today I'd like you to help me carry something upstairs," he said when he was through eating.

"Sure," I said. "Where is it?"

"In the basement. I'll have to help you, though. It's quite heavy."

We went downstairs, me all dressed and him in his dressing gown. What he wanted was right at the foot of the stairs. It was an oblong packing case, about four feet by two feet. Barnard lifted one end of the case but had trouble holding it off the floor.

"Better let me handle it myself," I said.

Sometimes two hands are better than four. I stood the case on end and then pulled it across one knee. With a good heave I had it up on my shoulder

and was ready to go. Barnard blinked but didn't say a word. He led the way up the stairs and through the hall to the stairway that led up to the second floor.

THERE was a long hall upstairs too.

I carried the case behind Barnard. He stopped before a door and I had to wait while he got his keys out and unlocked it. The room was dark. Barnard fumbled around and found a switch and turned on the lights.

In one corner of the room there was a cot and from its rumpled appearance I guessed that was where Barnard slept. The rest of the room was taken up by all kinds of electrical equipment, most of it wired to what looked like a cabinet in the center of the floor.

The cabinet was big enough to hold a man. It was painted black inside and had no doors. Wires were strung up and down from its floor to its roof, about six inches apart and running the full depth. Nearer the door of the room, and facing the cabinet, was a small wooden table on which was some sort of control panel covered with knobs and dials.

"You'd better put down the case," Barnard said.

I put it down gently, feeling foolish because I had stood there gawking around. Then I dusted off my hands and waited for Barnard to tell me to beat it.

"You're very strong, Bill," he said in a low voice.

"Yeah."

"And we were very clever, we thought. We made the atomic bomb and now we can't control it. Monkeys with machine guns."

"That's what we used to call the Japs," I said. He shook his head sadly.

"Do you think we'll ever learn, Bill?"

"Maybe."

"I don't. I wonder where I put that hammer." He stared around the room absent mindedly. "I've got to open this case."

I couldn't see a hammer anywhere so I bent and got my fingers under one of the boards that was nailed down on top of the box. With a few pulls I had it loose. The rest of the job was easy.

There was a layer of excelsior and as I pulled off the last board I took with it all of the top packing. Under the excelsior were a couple of big coils of fine silvery wire, something like the wire that was strung in the cabinet. I took a chance on a question.

"Silver?"

"No. It's mostly platinum, alloyed with tungsten. The wire in the receiver is silver."

I figured he meant the cabinet when he said receiver but didn't want to sound too snoopy. Besides, he was already busy pulling out the wire from the box. He looked excited. I closed the door behind me with a bang and made a lot of noise going down the stairs.

I DIDN'T go all the way. When I was near the bottom I stopped and listened. Faint sounds told me Barnard was busy. I turned and tiptoed back up and slid along the wall to the door of Barnard's room. Inside I heard him scurrying around.

He had forgotten to lock the door from the inside and when I bent I could see through the keyhole. He had both coils of platinum wire on the floor next to the cabinet and was feverishly at work unstringing the silver wire from the interior of the black lined box. It was going to take him a while to get that done and I figured I'd learn nothing watching him do it.

Anyway, I'd have something to tell

Laffy Dale when I saw him again. Barnard must have taken him for plenty, I thought. That case of platinum wire must have cost a fortune. Platinum is worth more than gold, and the case had been very heavy.

If I hadn't known better I'd never have believed Barnard was a crook. When he talked to me it seemed his mind was a million miles away. It was easy to think I could have stolen his front teeth without him missing them. Then I remembered the burglar alarms. Barnard was more careful than he acted.

There wasn't much for me to do that morning. I looked in the library for a book to read but couldn't find one; skimming through a few I discovered that there were thousands of words I'd never heard of. Also numbers and signs that might have been the top secret Navy code.

At noon I called three times to get Barnard down for lunch. He hadn't changed clothes and his hair was still mussed. He must have been working hard. Half his food he gobbled and the other half he left on his plate.

He was very excited, although he tried to bide the fact, and I caught some of the feeling. Whatever he was working on must be close to finished, I figured. When he got up from the table I was sure. He told me not to call him for dinner.

"You can't work if you don't eat," I said.

"I can. But if you want you might bring up some coffee and sandwiches around four o'clock."

It was four o'clock on the nose when I brought up the tray and knocked on his door. Barnard told me to come in. He had all the wire he'd taken out of the cabinet in coils in a corner and had already strung up a good deal of the new wire. At the rate he was going it

wouldn't take him long to finish.

"All right if I take the evening off?" I asked.

"Better not. I'll be working straight through and I'd rather not have any interruptions, like the phone ringing. If you want to take a walk for an hour or so that would be all right."

I said that was all I wanted to do anyway and that I would go out about eight and be back by nine. I don't think he even heard me. He was already back inside the cabinet.

Both Laffy and Welsher were at the corner when I got there. They could see I had news and their eyes lit up. Welsher glared at me suspiciously but I didn't pay any attention to him.

"You found out something!" Laffy blurted as I came up.

"Yeah. I got a look inside the room where Barnard works. And he acts like he's on to something big."

"What?"

I couldn't tell him. I described the cabinet and the wires but that didn't seem to mean anything to Laffy. When I told him about the platinum wire it was a different matter. His eyes popped.

"How much did you say there was?"

"I don't know exactly. Couple of hundred pounds."

I DIDN'T like the way he was acting or the way Welsher's face had become so tight. I remembered that feeling I'd had when Laffy made me his proposition.

"Remember what I told you," Laffy was saying to Welsher. "I told you Bill was just the man for the job. I said it wouldn't take him long. Didn't I?"

"That's right," Welsher said. "You said he was smart."

"There wasn't anything to it," I said. I felt my face getting red. There really

badn't been much for me to do.

"You got a key to Barnard's house?" Laffy asked.

I said I did and showed it to him. He looked at it for a second and then passed it on to Welsher who faded into the background while Laffy talked to me. I almost forgot to ask Welsher for it.

"See you tomorrow same time?" I asked Laffy. He thought it over.

"No. You take in a movie, Bill."

"That's a swell idea," Welsher said.

"Yeah, I haven't seen one in a long time."

"Tell you what," Laffy said. "There's a theatre down the street here. Meet us there at eight sharp."

"I'll be there." I was walking away when Laffy called me back.

"If anything comes up so you can't make it be sure to call us at the hotel. Or if Barnard is going to have company. He might be ready to make some move we'd want to know about."

That was when I remembered my key and got it back from Welsher. I thought he had been holding it tight in his hand because it felt slick, as though with oily perspiration. I rubbed it on my pants and put it back in my pocket.

I walked fast going home because I had used up most of the hour Barnard had allowed me and I figured he might get suspicious if I stayed away too long. But I needn't have worried. He was still working in his room and he didn't hear me coming in.

There were no lights in the lower part of the house. I turned some on and sat in the library, feeling like a traitor. Here I was, spying on a man I hadn't known even three days before.

The worst of it was that I couldn't help liking Barnard. He wasn't nearly as friendly as Laffy but there was



The girl sat in the garden, a smile on her face while she played with the puppy . . .

something gentle about him. And he was so interested in whatever he was working on that you wouldn't think he'd have time to spare on swindling.

Then I really felt like a traitor. Here I was supposed to be helping Laffy and I was sitting around telling myself what a nice guy Barnard was. And at that very minute he might be getting ready to duck out. You can never trust these scientists, I told myself. A lot of them are nuts. I decided to sneak up for another peek through the keyhole.

NOT a chance Barnard would bear me. That humming sound got stronger as I went up the stairs. I got hold and walked straight down the hall to Barnard's door. If he came out suddenly I could claim I had just come in. The door stayed closed.

I bent and glued my eye to the keyhole. After a few seconds I saw Barnard. He was at the far end of the room, his back to me. When he moved slightly I could see him fiddling with some dials. The humming got louder, then softer again, then settled down to a smooth sound.

The cabinet was all strung with wire now, so thick with it that it was hard to see the separate strands. Barnard turned and looked at it, cocked his ear, and seemed satisfied. His face looked thinner and more strained. He turned and came toward the door and I got ready to run, but he didn't come all the way.

He stopped at the wooden table and pulled a kitchen chair behind it and sat down, his back to me. He was so close that his back blocked out my view of the cabinet. By the motions of his arms and hands, though, I could tell he was turning knobs on the control panel on the table. His robe was off and he was wearing a cotton undershirt and I could see it stretch as he

took a deep breath and held it.

Beyond him the cabinet began to glow, first purple and then a soft pink. But I could see only the upper part of it. I took a chance and straightened up and got a firm grip on the knob of the door. Then, very slowly, I turned it.

Luckily the door hinges were well oiled. There wasn't a squeak as I pulled back on the knob. As gently as I could I drew my hand back until a crack of light showed through. And then suddenly there wasn't any light!

Surprise almost gave me away. For a second I thought that Barnard had realized I was at the door. I was about to jump back when I saw his shadow in the glow from the cabinet. He was still sitting at the table. The glow became stronger. I looked straight over Barnard's head into the cabinet.

The wires were invisible now. All I could see was the rosy light that filled the big box-like thing. That light was a strange thing. It grew thicker, as though coming through a dense fog. Then the fog lifted and the light became thin but shifting.

Something moved in the light. Shadows drifted and swirled and the glow faded to a dawn pink. The shadows stopped moving. They became giant trees.

At first I couldn't make head nor tail of what I was seeing. The trees seemed to be getting bigger. Then I realized I was watching something like a television screen, with the camera moving closer and closer to the objects that were being broadcast.

Only this wasn't a screen. It had depth! I had the feeling that I could reach out and touch the trees, that I was almost among them.

Barnard was doing something at the control panel and the trees moved faster. It was like coming down through

them with a parachute. We landed in a clearing, a clearing that was carpeted with soft violet grass. Great flowers grew wild all about with a lushness only possible in the tropics.

But it wasn't the tropics. The grass was like no grass I had ever seen, the flowers in colors and shapes that existed nowhere on earth. There was fruit, fruit that hung in enormous clusters on low bushes, that was red as rubies, as white as snow. Every color of the rainbow was there, and other colors I had never seen or dreamed of.

We were moving faster now, along a path that led from the clearing. The sensation was like driving a car full speed through great gardens. When we slowed at last we were before a city, a city of small homes made of a white material that glistened. Children played everywhere, with each other and with strange animals that were as large as wolves and as gentle as lambs.

Barnard seemed to know where he was going. We moved into the city and past the children. There were older people too, here and there, all dressed in simple robes, and their faces looked kind.

Before one of the homes we paused, then moved forward and into it. The furniture was simple, easy chairs and comfortable looking couches covered with strange and beautiful materials. Three children laughed over some game they were playing. An old man with a full white beard smiled as he spoke to a woman.

Barnard was searching for something or someone. We went from one room to another, finally out of the house and into the lush garden behind it. We stopped there, waited until I grew tired. Barnard was tired too. He heaved a long sigh, reached out a hand. There was a click as a switch was thrown. The scene faded slowly into a rosy glow

and then a purple one. The wires in the cabinet became visible again.

I shut the door gently. When Barnard came downstairs I was puttering around the kitchen.

I HAD expected him to act disappointed but he fooled me. Tiredness showed in his eyes and on his face. But also a quiet happiness. He smiled.

"I didn't hear you come in, Bill. Have you been back long?"

"Just a little while," I lied. "I didn't want to disturb you at your work so I was pretty quiet."

He thought that was mighty considerate of me and I felt guilty all over again. I covered it up by getting to work on a snack for him. This time he ate everything on his plate. He was still trying to act calm, but underneath I could tell he was very excited.

"Anything special you want me to do tonight?" I asked.

"No. Just make certain all the windows and doors are locked and that the alarm is on. Tomorrow, however, I want you to get something for me."

"Sure."

He dug in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills and peeled off a couple of tens and handed them to me.

"Find a pet shop and buy a young puppy, or a kitten."

"First thing in the morning," I said.

"Any time during the day will do. I won't need it until evening. Good night, Bill."

I said good night and he went upstairs. Then I checked all the windows and the doors. They were all right. I went to bed and fell asleep wondering what he wanted with a puppy or a kitten. It didn't seem to make any difference to him which it was.

I woke up the next morning still

wondering. Maybe I ought to call Laffy. But it didn't seem important enough. If anything happened during the day, an emergency, I could always get Laffy on the phone.

Barnard had lost his edginess when he came down in the middle of the morning. He had taken the time to shave and the hollows under his eyes were not so deep. Instead of rushing back to his room he stayed downstairs in the library and read.

It was after lunch that I finally went out looking for a pet shop. I had to walk a mile or so to a business district before finding one. It was a warm day, though, and I didn't mind.

I spent the whole twenty dollars for a little black cocker spaniel. When I brought it back Barnard said it was fine although he hardly looked at it. I took it in the kitchen and gave it some milk and a few scraps of meat. It was frisky and I played with it all afternoon until after dinner. Then Barnard took it upstairs.

I was still wondering what he was going to do with it and finally I decided to go up and take a peek. The humming was going strong again. Looking through the keyhole, I saw Barnard had tied the puppy to a leg of the table with a short piece of string.

This time Barnard didn't do so much adjusting of the dials. He seemed to have everything the way he wanted. I had figured to go right back downstairs but when he sat down at the table and switched off the lights I couldn't resist staying. In a jiffy I had the door open a crack and was looking over his head into the cabinet. There was the same purple glow changing to rose. It took less time than the night before. Within a couple of minutes the murkiness in the cabinet thinned and the shifting shadows turned into trees. It was the same

clearing.

Only this time the clearing wasn't empty. There was a girl in it. She stood there, very still, as though she was waiting for something. Then I knew. She was waiting for Barnard. We came down through the big trees until she was very close.

SHE was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Black hair hung thick and was gathered at the back of her neck. Her eyes were wide and brown and innocent, like a child's. Jewels as big as grapes sparkled on a bracelet on her wrist.

"Maura," Barnard said. She seemed to be looking straight at him but I knew she couldn't see him.

"Andrew?" Her lips were parted in a happy smile. "I waited for you yesterday."

"It took longer than I thought it would. But it's all right now."

"Have you decided what to do?"

"Of course. I'm coming to you. If I can. And don't ask me if I'm sure I want to. I leave nothing behind but hate and prejudice and fear. If I thought I could do something here I might stay. But it's no use. I'm going to test the sender now."

Barnard bent and untied the string from the table leg. He lifted the puppy and carried it to the edge of the cabinet and set it down. The puppy hesitated and Barnard gave it a little push. It walked into the cabinet and into the clearing. Maura looked down and saw it and gave a glad cry.

"It works," Barnard said, not very surprised but real happy.

I couldn't have picked a worse time to sneeze. It was just a little one that I half smothered. But it was as loud as it had to be. Barnard whirled.

"Bill?"

"Yeah." My face was burning as I

stepped into the room. I tried to think of something to say. "I came up here and the door was open a little. I couldn't pull myself away."

The girl was still in the clearing, holding the puppy in her arms. Her face was puzzled.

"Where is she?" I asked. My curiosity had got the better of me.

"I don't know," Barnard said. "Not in this world certainly. But in a far better one, where people don't have to be afraid of each other; a world, probably, like Eden before the serpent came. For a long time I've known there were other worlds than ours. Now I've found the right one and I've discovered how to get there."

He was still talking but I wasn't listening any longer. Inside of me there was that feeling, working its way through my stomach to my heart. I had swung the door almost shut behind me when I came into the room. Now when I turned it was open.

Laffy Dale and Alex Welscher were standing in the doorway, each with a gun in his hand.

"I thought you were going to meet us at the theatre," Laffy said to me.

I realized I had forgotten all about it. But at the same time I realized that Laffy and Welscher hadn't had any intention of being there. It had been a trick to get me out of the house.

"Do you know these two, Bill?" Barnard asked. There wasn't any need for me to answer.

"He's just a sucker," Laffy said. "I told him you cheated us out of money and we wanted to get the goods on you. He doesn't know we worked for you until you caught us stealing."

"What do you want now?" Barnard asked in a choked voice.

"We thought we wanted a couple of coils of platinum wire," Welscher said. "But it looks like we can make a better

haul than that."

HE was looking at Maura. The jewels on her wrist flashed as she moved her hand. I felt a chill run down my spine. The thought of a pair like Laffy and Welscher in that world Barnard had discovered made me feel sick. Welscher moved toward the cabinet.

"Wait," Barnard said. He took a step toward Welscher and the gun swung his way.

It was all the opening I needed. Before Welscher could swing my way I had my hand on the gun and was tearing it from his grasp. Laffy tried to cover me but I threw Welscher into him and knocked him off balance. A shot hit the ceiling and then I had both guns. One went in my pocket.

"Go on," I said to Barnard. "I'll cover these two crooks."

"Come with me, Bill," he said.

"And leave them to follow us? Nix. Besides, a dope like me don't deserve it. Go on, now."

I felt his hand on my shoulder and then he was stepping toward the cabinet. The pink glow was all around him. And then he wasn't in the room with me any more. He was in the clearing with Maura and she was smiling up at him.

For just a second I'd taken my eyes off Laffy and Welscher. They moved fast. Before I could turn back they had knocked the gun from my hand. Their fists pounded at me. We went into a wild tangle and crashed into the table and tipped it over.

Somehow Welscher got his knife out. The blade flashed down at me as we rolled on the floor. I threw up my hand and got it on his wrist and twisted. They'd made a sucker out of me but I wasn't going to let them kill me.

I was on the bottom, both of them

on top of me. The knife fell out of Welshe's hand as I twisted. Laffy threw a punch at my head and I took it. But I had my left hand against his chest, my right hand at Welshe's belt. With all my strength I heaved outward.

Both of them flew back at once, straight for the cabinet!

But it wasn't the same cabinet, somehow. The pink glow was gone and a green one had taken its place. Into the green light Laffy and Welshe tumbled, into a world that was not the same as Maura's. There were no flowers here, only queer writhing things that slithered toward the two men.

I heard them scream. And then the green light was fading and I couldn't see them any longer. When we had tipped over the table we had somehow changed the controls.

The green light was altogether gone now and for a moment the room was pitch dark. I got to my feet and got the smell of burning insulation. A moment later a sheet of flame leaped out of one wall.

I didn't try to put the fire out. I didn't want to save Barnard's equipment. Maura's world will be better off if no more of us get there. We'd only spoil it.

THE END

The CORNEAL LENS



By FRANCES YERXA



ONE of the most notable advances made in medicine, particularly in ophthalmology, the science of "eyes," was the development of the contact lens. The contact lens is a substitute of great superiority for common eyeglasses. It is essentially a correcting lens which fits against the eyeball directly instead of being supported in frames as are ordinary glasses.

Contact lenses are made by first making a mold of the anesthetized eyeball, then molding and grinding small lenses to fit this mold. The lens is filled then with a solution which can be tolerated by the eye, slipped under the eyelid and immediately becomes a part so to speak of the eyeball. These marvelous gadgets are used by more and more people, especially athletes, actors, heavy workers, and those whose livelihood depends either on their appearance or who stand the chance of having their eyes injured if they wear conventional glasses.

The major drawback to the wearers of contact lenses, marvelous though they are, is the fact that the lens can be tolerated in the eye for only certain periods of time, ranging from an hour to a day depending of the person and the nature of the solution he uses in the lens. It is extremely difficult for the average wearer of contact lenses to find a solution that will be tolerated by his eye and one that will not interfere with his vision.

Apparently this is about to be changed. Medical researchers have reported the development of a contact lens of a radically new type. Light enters the eye through the cornea, the rest of the

eye being opaque. Why, then, have glass covering the entire eyeball? Well, previously this was necessary so that the actual lens-part which covers the cornea and through which the light passes to fall on the retina, would stay in place and would not shift all over the eyeball.

The researchers have developed what they call the "corneal lens." This is a tiny piece of optical glass just large enough to fit over the cornea. It is ground and figured precisely as any other type of lens used to correct eyesight. The difference is this: The corneal lens stays in position over the cornea purely by cohesion, the natural wetness of the eyeball furnishing the binding force, much as will paper stick to glass by the capillary forces involved.

This astounding, if simple, arrangement, eliminates completely the major bugaboo of contact lenses. Now the wearer need no longer search for suitable solutions. Furthermore, the lenses can be worn indefinitely without removal because no solution needs to be replaced.

These gadgets are still in the experimental stage, though first reports are very optimistic and promise great things. It is said that some thirty people are wearing the experimental corneal lens with complete comfort and satisfaction.

Of course these lenses are designed to correct the same defects corrected by regular eyeglasses or contact lenses. The totally blind naturally cannot be aided by such apparatuses. However, various government and private agencies are devoting a great deal of time and money to the de-

velopment of mechanisms to assist the blind.

Still, too, in the experimental stage is a new machine whose function is the translation of printed matter into audible sounds—a series of dots and dashes similar to Morse code. The device is a little larger than a fountain pen, is powered by batteries and contains a small photoelectric cell. The blind person desiring to read an ordinary book, scans the lines of type with the machine by feel. As it passes over the various letters and consequently receives more or less light according to the shape and size of the type beneath it, it gives forth through a small headphone from an audio oscillator a series of buzzes which the blind man

can learn to interpret in terms of printed matter. He can recognize the sound made by individual letters. This is a tremendous boon to the blind. It does away with the tedious and bulky printing of Braille. Furthermore it opens up all printed matter to the blind person, whereas now he has available to him only those things which have been translated into Braille. While the machine is not yet in common use or production, undoubtedly it will be produced soon. Technological advances these days are so rapid that it is not impossible that a machine may appear which will read conventional type and translate it into audible words!

Indian Funeral Customs

★ By Pete Bogg ★

DEATH is a very common occurrence in India because of their poor living conditions. Their death rate is much higher than ours in the United States and their span of life much shorter. When a death occurs in a family, the body is taken out of the house immediately. If the corpse is a woman it is wrapped in red, if it is a man it is wrapped in white. But children and people who have died with smallpox or leprosy are not wrapped at all, but just carried down to the Ganges river and tossed in.

The funerals are far from elaborate. The procession is crude, for there is not even a hearse. The body is tied to a pole by the neck and ankles, and carried on the shoulders of two relatives down to the bank of the river. The body is given its final purification bath in the river, and then the hearse build the funeral pyre of logs till it's about four feet in height. The body is laid on the top and then pieces of cow dung are laid on the chest. Cows are sacred in India. Then the widow or nearest relative goes up the steps to a place where the holy fire is brought to burn the body. After a short time the widow comes down all dressed in white with her head shaven. Then she places some meal on her husband's mouth, and with no visible sign of emotion, sets fire to the wood nearest the husband's throat. She may even use a pole to poke at the fire to make it burn faster, and after the fire dies down she picks up the remaining pieces and throws them into the Ganges. Then she removes all her jewelry, and that is thrown into the river. Finally she fills a jar of water and dumps that over the ashes of her husband, and then walks up the steps never to look back on that spot again. If you ever have the misfortune to die in India, you could never be more dead than when they finish with you.

Final Royal Voyage

★ By Jon Barry ★

NOT many years ago a startling discovery was made in Norway. While working his small farm one day a Norwegian farmer struck a huge piece of timber. Unknowing as to what it might be, he probed further and discovered that the timber much resembled the beam of a ship of ancient vintage. Now, his farm was far inland and the discovery left him speechless. Wisely, he consulted the civil authorities of the town. Eventually, the news of the discovery was referred to the University of Oslo. A staff of archeologists were soon on the spot and began excavating the buried find. After careful removal of the ground the investigators discovered that it was the burial place of a former monarch of Norway. Although not proven conclusively, it was thought that the buried ship was the final resting place of Queen Aasa who ruled the Vikings sometime in the 9th century.

The seagoing mausoleum was properly fitted for a long voyage with evidence of stores in the hold befitting the needs of a queen on a trip. The interior was lavishly outfitted with beautifully worked mats, a complete boudoir, and loom, supposedly a pastime of the departed queen. Another form of recreation provided was a chessboard to ease the long hours of the journey. The remains of a servant girl were also discovered. Another curious insight to the superstition on after-life was the finding of four sleds complete with dogs and harness which were provided should the good queen travel during the winter snows.

The archeologist concluded, however, that they were not the first to find the resting place of Aasa for they found no jewels. Evidence carefully studied led them to believe that the tomb was looted centuries earlier and the jewels stolen.

Ginno's eyes bulged in amazement
as a white-robed figure stepped
from the interior of the cabinet



Gimme Finds the Gimmick

by Berkeley Livingston

"... **A** AH, shut up and gimme a ciggie," Gimme Burk said.

"But Gimme," Horace Walpole remonstrated through pouting, barely-moving lips. "That ain't no way to talk. I was just saying this guy, Cornell Wilde... Boy, oh boy! C'n he charm the dames!"

"Ph'tt! That's what I think of Cornell Wilde," Gimme said. "I'm talkin' about that magician they had on the bill. What a fake! A fraud like that shouldn't be allowed to operate. There oughta be a law against him..."

Horace Walpole's big, blank, blue eyes regarded his friend with mixed feelings. Horace had high regard for Cornell Wilde. He also thought a lot of Gregory Peck, Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, and Harry Carey. But the Wilde man was his boy. Boy, oh boy! How

that man could make with the bow and arrow. Better than Cupid.

They passed a newsstand and Gimme's fumble fingers slipped the coins from the tops of several papers while the newsboy's back was turned. There was enough there for a couple of cups of coffee. Gimme had the change for the doughnuts.

"Gee!" Horace said between sips of the brew and bites of the sinker. "Some of them guys is lucky. Hollywood! Boy, oh boy! That's for me!"

"Ape pictures is outta style," Gimme said sourly.

"What you mean? I ain't no ape."

"Then you better stop scratching yourself before somebody gives you a banana."

"Aaw! What makes you so hot, today?" Horace asked.

"Them fakes, that's what," Gimme

The magician's cabinet
was obviously a trick gadget
and nothing else. But was it?



said bitterly. "Now take the guy who was there, today. Y'notice he didn't ask me to go on the stage when he wanted volunteers. Nah! He *picks* his stooge. He ain't dumb."

"Well, gee, Gimme! The way you come runnin' up there, hollerin' he can't fool you. No wonder he was mad."

"An act, Horace. An act. He knew I'd of showed him up for a fake. They can't fool me. It's done with mirrors. Gimmicks! That's what they call 'em!"

Horace regarded the other in round-eyed amazement. Gee! Gimme knew everything. Hadn't he won twenty dollars on a Doctor I.Q. show? And when they listened to Information Please on the radio, didn't Gimme know almost all the answers? Well, some of them. Come to think of it, the guy sitting on the other side of Gimme had given him the answer on the I.Q. show. And the nerve of the guy, wanting a split, later.

"Some of these days," Gimme said darkly, "I'm gonna be picked, and then . . ."

HARLEY THORNDYKE didn't care much what happened to him. Sybil Mason, the glorious, glamorous, gluttonous Sybil Mason, had deserted him. And all because he had said she had the eating manners of a pig. Of course it wasn't a nice thing to say. Still . . .

He was very careful about the Windsor knot having that *careless* look. There were some things which were *musts* in his business. Having a certain careless quality about the way a man dressed, was one of them. He tucked a fine lawn hankie in his pocket making sure only a small ridge of immaculate white showed, gave it a final pat and was ready for the evening.

He waved a hand in farewell to the desk clerk of the hotel, the only hotel in Chicago where actors, actresses and

their agents stayed, the Ministry North, and walked out into Michigan Boulevard. The doorman started to whistle up a cab, but Harley shook him off. The night air was pleasant and he needed some exercise.

His mind, which had put the subject of Sybil Mason aside, took it up again, as he strolled west on Oak Street. Now why was it so absolutely necessary to tell her she ate like a pig? She was good to the tune of three hundred dollars a week. Fifteen-hundred-dollars-a-week actresses were hard to find. And in Harley's business, actor's agent, they were his bread and butter, not to speak of the home he maintained in California, and the town and country roadster he had bought, and the hundred and one other things they gave him.

He had others, even a couple who made more than she, but the Sybil gal was something, well, *the* something that was different. For one thing she was his creation. He had found her working in a dive right here in Chicago, a place called the Card Box, or Hat Box or some such name. She was doing a strip for peanut money. As a kick, he had sat with her and bought her B drinks just, to tell the truth, to be near her, she was that beautiful. One of the orchestra boys sat at the piano behind the bar and had begun to give out with the notes of a torch song that was popular then. Sybil raised a low, husky voice, which had an oddly compelling quality to it, and sang the words to Harley. He knew in that first instant she opened her mouth, he had found something. All it needed was development.

And he had developed her; so well, in fact, Hollywood gave her her own ticket a year later.

But he had told her she ate like a pig, not literally of course, yet unmistakably. And she had blown her top and

given him the heave-ho. What was more, there wasn't anything he could do about it. He had no contract with her.

His thoughts had gone apace with his feet, and when he stopped thinking about her, he found himself in the neon section of Rush Street. Taverns stood cheek by jowl with swank restaurants; night clubs and literary chin-joints elbowed each other; and Fords and Cadillacs shared the same curb. It was the same street, he realized, on which he had discovered Sybil Mason.

He grinned to himself at a sudden quickening heartbeat. He knew why his heart had accelerated its beat. Another Mason gal, perhaps . . . No. The Sybil Masons of this world were few and far between. But he was warm, and a cooling beer would not be amiss.

The name of the joint was the Barbary Coast and the interior had been done in the style of the '90's. A semi-circular bar on one side; dark, sheltered booths on the other; and at the rear, beyond a slatted arbor-like contrivance, more tables and a small floor. The floor show was on. Harley walked to the rear, where a girl in the tightest slacks Harley had ever seen, guided him to a table to one side. He ordered a whiskey-and-water and sat back, amused and, somehow, expectant.

HIS drink was brought and he paid for it. There was a girl doing a character dance on the platform. He watched her and wondered what on earth made girls like these go in for the stage. She would have served a better purpose as a stenographer. He became aware of murmured words directed at him. He looked over his shoulder. It was the waitress.

"Mind if this gentleman sits with you, mister?" she was saying.

"Why no. It's okay," Harley said,

and grinned up at the man by the girl's side.

The stranger shook his head in thanks and sat down, his back to the wall and his profile toward Harley, presenting a lean, long sideview of a nose and chin and high, rather wide forehead. A thin line of hair perched unobtrusively on his upper lip. There was something sardonic, almost saturnine in the stranger's face.

The M.C., a tall, good-looking man with no talent, made a few perfunctory remarks about the last act, and introduced the next, a magician, with the closing remarks:

" . . . Better hang onto your pocket books, girls, and drink with Winko, the *Wonder Worker!*"

As a stage personality, Winko proved to be a disappointment. He was short, stout, with the usual round, slightly blank face of most short, fat men. He was wearing a dinner jacket of ancient vintage, a holed shirt, the hosom of which protruded for several vulgar inches from what appeared to be a pair of unbuttoned or unzipped trousers. The sight of the half foot of shirt showing where it did brought a gleeful shout from the house.

Winko, standing with one hand glued to the mike in what looked to be a grip of do-or-die, looked wonderingly about. Someone at a ringside table pointed out the offending shirt front. Winko's lower lip disappeared between his upper teeth and a *bright red glow lighted his features!*

Harley Thorndyke's hored look vanished. The man's face had actually turned red, and not from a rush of blood. It was as if he had control of some artificial interior lighting. A zany giggle broke from the round lips, and Winko's hands went to the offending shirt. Harley was quick to notice that the hands were short, stub-fingered and

slightly clumsy. They weren't as quick nor as wonderfully elastic as the fingers of other magicians he knew.

"Clever, isn't he, Mister Thorn-dyke?" Harley's table-mate said.

But Harley was watching the man on the stage too intently to note that the stranger had called him by name. In fact, he hadn't even heard the other.

On the stage, Winko was busy with his act. He started to pull at the shirt, and from the partly opened garment an amazing assortment of things came to light. First, came a bed sheet, which was thrown to one side; next came a clothesline full of wearing apparel, which joined the bed sheet; next appeared a whole string of diapers. These also were piled on the already large heap of things on one side of the magician. In rapid succession, Winko pulled a half dozen tableclothes, which made the women members of the audience sigh in despair, then he pulled out an Oriental rug, and last an immense banner which Winko flung outward and which through some means or other managed to stay aloft long enough for the audience to read, "WINKO, THE WONDER MAN," on it. All these joined the pile.

Then, with a fine display of disdain, Winko kicked at the pile, and before the startled eyes of his audience, the whole pile of assorted materials simply vanished into nothingness.

The applause rang out for several moments. And Harley's was not the first pair of hands to stop clapping.

"**R**ATHER clever, isn't he, Mister Thorn-dyke?" the stranger asked again.

This time Harley heard the man. He turned wondering eyes toward the lean, angular face directed toward his.

"How did you know my name?" he asked.

"Why, it's written all over your tie pin," the man replied.

Harley looked down at the pin in question and did a double-take. His name, in glowing, luminescent script gleamed its initials at him. For a moment he thought he was seeing things. He blinked, but when he opened his eyes again, they were still there.

"Disconcerting, isn't it?" the man asked. "The impossible takes place and the mind tries to reject it as being some sort of trick . . ."

Harley grabbed the glass of whiskey and water and downed it in a single hasty gulp. Some of the liquid dripped down the corners of his mouth. What on earth was going on? This man had read his mind. Who was he, Dunninger?

"No. Although he, too, is excellent. But he works with gimmicks. I, on the other hand, come by my skill from other means. For example, take my pupil up there, Winko. Not had for a lad who only a few weeks ago couldn't lift a glass without having it slip through his fingers."

Another burst of applause brought their eyes back to the stage. Winko was standing, his hands up for silence. He spoke in a thin, piping voice:

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, the finale of my act. May I have a volunteer from the audience; a gentleman, preferably?"

"Go ahead, Mister Thorn-dyke," the stranger said, an odd smile on his lips, "volunteer."

It was as if he had said, I dare you.

"But why?" Harley asked, although his question held no point. He was already rising to his feet.

"Because," said the other, "you may be able to use Winko."

"Aah! Thank you, sir," Winko said, making way for Harley at the mike.

"Nice looking chap, isn't he?" he continued, looking down at the audience for

confirmation.

There was laughter at the remark.

Winko turned to Harley, and for the first time Harley had a good look at the magician. He was still a short, fat man, who, like most fat men, perspired a great deal. There was only one thing which seemed different about Winko, his eyes. They seemed out of focus, Harley thought. Or maybe it was the lighting? But there was something peculiar about their blankness.

"Now don't be frightened at what happens," Winko said. "You have my assurance that it will be quite all right. Now, for some assistance from our friend, George Bendix, the man who's so hep to the chintz."

George Bendix was the handsome master of ceremonies. At the mention of his name, he came from a side door, trundling before him a tall cabinet which moved on coasters. He brought the cabinet up before the microphone, smiled pleasantly and walked off-stage.

"Observe," Winko said, pointing to the cabinet, "there is space below, and when I open the doors, you can see the chintzy band back there on the stand."

Laughter greeted his words.

He went on:

"Now then, sir, I think, like all of us, you've had desires to be something other than what you are, at some time in your life. I don't mean President or a fireman on a train, but something strange. A butterfly for example, or maybe a horse, or even a fairy princess. Right?"

"Yes," Harley said, smiling.

"Good! Suppose you name three things which you once hoped to be."

"Well, the butterfly was a good guess. I once saw a nice pig, and wondered what it would be like to be one. And for the third item, let's say, a dog."

"Very well. We'll take them in order. Now, ladies and gentlemen, your atten-

tion! This very kind gentleman is going to step into the magic cabinet. Then, at the mention of the magic formula, he will be changed into the three animals mentioned. One at a time, of course. If you please, sir . . ."

WINKO closed the rear door, and motioned with his arm for Harley to step into the cabinet. Harley smiled pleasantly, and did so.

The door closed on Harley. He found himself not too crowded, and he could hear Winko's voice quite plainly through the thin partition, going into his spiel. But the darkness was complete.

Harley grinned to himself. But the grin faded from his lips at the memory of certain very strange acts Winko had performed. And the words of the stranger who had sat beside him, returned. Then Winko was pronouncing the magic formula:

"*ADASALAAM!*"

Harley Thorndyke felt a strange warmth possess his every sense, an odd feeling of lightness flooded his soul, then, with a sound that was like the crack of a thunderbolt, darkness came over his brain. The darkness lasted only an instant, and the fog-black lifted from his eyes.

He was floating on high. Below, a wall of uplifted faces met his eyes. A ridiculous creature was also looking up at him, and pointing with his hand. Words came from the fat man's lips:

"You see. The cabinet is empty. And there is our friend, who has been changed into a butterfly. Shall we ask him how he feels?"

There were shouts of encouragement.

A hidden voice made Harley talk:

"I feel fine. I guess this is the first time I've ever flown without the aid of a little yocky."

IT CAN'T BE, Harley thought. He

was alive to everything. He knew he was what Winko had called him, a butterfly. Yet he was also Harley Thorn-dyke, actor's agent. Once more Winko spoke:

"But we can't keep him fluttering up there all night. All right, sir, you may go back in the cabinet. After all, you've got to be a pig and dog, too."

In quick succession, the magic word made a pig and dog out of Harley. And always there was the sound of thunder and the fog-black through which he swam to the metamorphosis. And at the end he returned to his normal self.

"Thank you, sir," Winko said, and Harley detected a sardonic note in his voice, as the other gestured Harley off the stage.

The stranger was still at the table when Harley returned.

"Well, Thorndyke. What do you think of my protege?" the man asked.

"I think he's the most terrific thing I've ever seen. What I want to know is what's he doing in a joint like this?"

"Fame must begin somewhere. I chose this spot—"

But before the other was through, Harley butted in:

"Wait a second, pal! There's a couple of things on my mind. First of all, the business with the tie pin. Okay, so I can't guess how you worked my name out on it. But I do want to know how you *knew* my name?"

"I am Ali Singh Ghigh," the stranger said, "Master Magician to his Majesty, Adasalaam. To me all things are plain. However, it is beneath the dignity of a Master Magician to practice his arts in public. He must needs have a pupil."

"Winko is my pupil."

"Singh Ghigh, Singh Lhow! What the hell do I care what the name is—"

"But in Hindustani, name means all,"

Ali said.

"So okay, pal Ali. Name means Ali. A joke, keed, that's a joke."

But the dark eyes regarding him only stared harder, and the lips did not curl in laughter.

"H'm," Harley continued. "So let's talk about something else."

"Exactly," Ali said. "Let us talk of other things. You are an impresario. I have a trade to practice. How can we meet on common ground?"

"Which same translated to English, means, how's about a job, keed? Right?"

"In vulgar terms, you hit the dingus on the shnozzola!" Ali said.

"I'm no booker, but I've got the proper connections, Ali. Night spots like these aren't good for an act like you've got. We need a theatre, and not too small a house, either. How's about costumes?"

"I have all the details," Ali said. "However, I was thinking of a stooge for Winko. . ."

"Good idea! Now look, I'm going to be in town for a week. I'll run an ad in some of the papers and we'll get a stooge. In the morning I'll make contacts for a house. In the meantime leave me a number where I can reach you . . ."

Ali reached for the pencil Harley gave him, scribbled the name of a second-rate Clark Street hotel and shook Harley's hand in farewell.

HARLEY looked at the ten people who had reported in answer to the ad, and immediately discarded the two women and five of the men. That left three out of the ten.

One was a slender youngster, nicely dressed and obviously impressed with the hotel suite. Harley told the other two to wait in a far corner of the room while he interviewed the third. But after a few words, he realized the young fellow was both too young and

too stage struck to be of particular use in Ali's trade. That left the two . . . Well, *dams* was the only word for them. He motioned for the shorter of the two to come over, but they both stepped forward.

"Not you," he said to the taller. "I want this one."

"Horace ain't so smart," Gimme said. "He don't talk unless I'm by his side."

"So his name is Horace, eh? Horace what?"

"Horace Walpole. But that ain't his real name. He ain't got none. We used to call him Squidgy but it ain't right for a grown man not to have a name. So I picked one out for him."

"Rather fancy," Harley said, smiling. "And what's yours?"

"Burk, Gimme Burk. They call me Gimme because I'm always saying . . ."

"Gimme a light, or whatever it is you want," Harley said. "Right?"

"On the nose, Jack. Now what about this job?"

"Well . . ." Harley closed his eyes in a well-known studied gesture, and leaned back in the chair. He had already made his mind up about these two. At the beginning he thought a single stooge would work better, but now he had a better idea. This cocky Burk fellow . . . "How come you and your friend applied for a job?" Harley asked suddenly.

"The word magician, pal. That's what got me. Fr years I been tryin' to get on a bill with one of those fakes and show 'em up. Now I got a chance, maybe, to work up close and see how they work them gimmicks. Man, that's f'r me."

So, Harley thought. Another form of what was called being stage-struck. Maybe it was for the better. He shook his head in swift decision. Hauling the blank of paper to him, he scribbled out

the address of the theatre and gave it to Burk, saying:

"Tomorrow morning, at ten. Be there. And here's a sawbuck to bind it."

Gimme's hand folded about the ten-dollar bill, opened swiftly and Harley's eyes went wide when he saw the palm was bare.

"I ain't so bad myself, eh, mister?" Gimme said.

Harley grinned and replied:

"No. Maybe we'll use you if Winko doesn't work out. Okay, Burk. I'll be seeing you."

It wasn't till after the two men left, that Harley realized he was getting himself into something. After all, he had come to Chicago for a vacation. And here he was getting right down to business with a magic act, a relic of the vaudeville days. Why, even the movies could do things on a grander scale. But . . .

"SO what were you worried about?"

Gimme asked, as they walked back toward their hotel on south State Street.

"Gee, Gimme!" Horace could no more help showing admiration than a dog licking the hand of its master. "You sure made him notice you, all right."

"And what's more we got the job, didn't we?"

"An' bow! Say, Gimme," Horace had one of his infrequent thoughts, "maybe now I'll have a chance to get to Hollywood, huh?"

"Could he," Gimme said in answer, though his mind was on something else; now he was in a spot to see how they operated those gimmicks.

"You mean maybe not?" there were almost tears in Horace's voice.

"Huh?" Gimme was brought back to the present.

"Hollywood. Think we might get there?"

Gimme smiled suddenly. Poor old Squidgy. Always wanting to go to Hollywood. How he loved the glamor of the name and place. He hoped they would go there. This Thorndyke guy seemed to be quite a higgie; Ministry North was not a hotel for pikers. He looked sidewise at his friend. Squidgy sure wasn't much to look at! Even a dope would feel like a Quiz Kid after a minute's talk with Squidgy. But he was such a good guy.

Squidgy caught the corner look and smiled with baby-round mouth and bland innocent eyes. And Gimme knew why he liked . . . Hell! *Loved* was the word, this poor coot. He was just like a child to whom the world was like a fairy tale. Gimme felt a sudden anger at himself that he had ever spoken in harsh accents to this innocent. His arm went around the other's shoulder and he gave him an affectionate squeeze.

"Listen, Squidgy," Gimme said. "I'm going to learn all the angles to this racket and after a while maybe me and you'll branch out in a racket all our own. How'd you like that?"

"Boy, oh boy!" there was no questioning the delight of Horace Walpole's exclamation. "That's what, uh, uh, boy, oh boy!"

That night Gimme dreamed he was the world's greatest magician. There was no end to the things he could do . . .

"WELL, Ali," Harley said, as they sat together and watched Winko and his two stooges rehearse, "how do you like the men I picked?"

"Excellent. Especially the tall lean one. He has that country-humpkin air about him in spite of his all too-apparent city upbringing, which makes for a good act. The short, fat man

with the slightly idiot air of innocence can be used for added effect. However, the fat one looks too much like what he is."

"You don't quite get it, Ali old son," Harley said. "Gimme is going to be the real stooge. The minute the audience sees Horace up there on the stage, there's going to be lotssa razzberries. That's when Gimme comes in. He comes yelling down the aisle. And Winko makes him come on stage . . .

"I see," Ali said. "There's no need to go further."

They watched Winko put the two men through their paces in silence. But only Gimme was used in the cabinet. The sight of the cabinet made a question pop into Harley's mind.

"How come there isn't more than just the cabinet in your act, Ali?" he asked.

Ali turned to him with a tight smile on his lips. Now in the fair light from the stage, Harley had a good look at the magician. He was quite handsome in a dark, almost sullen manner. There was something magnetic in the black eyes, something fanatic, also. Harley repressed a slight shudder, and wondered why the involuntary twitch came on him. There was the sudden sound of footsteps clattering down the wooden stairs of the stage runway.

It was Gimme. He was alone. Winko was trying to explain something to Horace on the stage. Gimme dropped into the seat beside Harley.

"Well, Gimme. How's it going?" Harley asked.

There was something savage in Gimme's reply:

"Swell! Just dandy! I'll be damned if I can figure that cabinet out. I looked high and low inside of it . . . and what's more, how the hell does he get all that stuff out of his pants?"

Harley laughed. The same question

had also occurred to him.

"That is a something I cannot disclose," Ali said. "But in the land from which I come, the smallest child, who in later years will become a magician, learns that in his first years."

"Yeah, yeah!" Gimme had contempt for this explanation. Whom did this Ali character think he was kidding, Squidgy? Why did they always have to give this "land where I came from" routine? Altogether, Ali looked like he was a native of the Syrian section down on Ogden and California. "I know. Trade secrets. But I'll get the hang of it one of these days . . ." The last was said in dark accents, as if in threat.

Harley smiled more broadly, but Ali seemed to take Gimme seriously.

"One does not learn these things casually, as though one were making a hat. It is an *art*! And a most difficult one . . ."

"What's so arty about saying Adasalaam?" Gimme asked.

"It is not the name alone . . . It is bow and who invokes the dread and great and noble diety," Ali answered.

A COUPLE of con boys giving each other the business, Harley thought. The same the world over. Secrets. He wondered anew about Sybil Mason, and if she were filling her soft, desirable mouth with food, as though it were a hopper made for no other purpose.

"Okay. Okay," Gimme said, rising and stalking to the stage once more. "But I'm tellin' you. One of these days . . ."

Ali gave Gimme's back an indifferent stare, and turned again to Harley.

"You had asked me something . . .?" he said.

"Yes. About the cabinet. Is that the only gadget you're going to use?"

"Yes. All other things would be

superfluous. It was told to me by Adasalaam, before I left, that what we sought will be found here."

"You *don't* say," Harley's amusement was ill-concealed.

"I knew you would come to that evil-smelling place. For I saw, long ago, the quarrel between you and the woman . . ."

Harley swallowed hastily. This guy was sheer wizard. How did he know about the battle he and Sybil had?

". . . It is like a drama which needs must have certain actors on the stage. The hero, if we can call him that, has not appeared, though he will, he *must* come. My life is forfeit if he does not come. You knew it not, but *you sought me out*. I can see the disbelief in your eyes. Listen. A man is coming to see you. He will tell you your hotel called and that Sybil Mason is waiting there for you. Now!"

A sudden anger stirred in Harley's breast. This was going a little too far. Sybil Mason waiting for him. Hell! That gal was through! She had told him so . . .

"Mr. Thorndyke," a voice called to him over his shoulder.

Harley turned and saw the theatre manager.

"Your hotel is on the wire," the man said.

"Huh?"

"They say a lady—"

But Harley was already running down the aisle. Ali's reassuring smile told the manager nothing. He met Harley coming back. There was a grin from ear to ear on the actor agent's face.

"You win, Ali," Harley said. "It was Sybil. Stick around. I'll bring her back with me."

Up on the stage, Gimme had Horace to one side and was whispering at a furious rate to him:

"I been watching this Winko character. That gibberish he talks don't mean a thing. It's the cabinet, Squidgy. We gotta get it. Tonight, Squidgy, after the show . . ."

"But Gimme," Horace was horrified. Stealing pennies off a newstand was one thing. This was another.

" . . . Easy, Squidgy. Here comes the shamus. I'll figure out an angle."

But Winko only came over to tell them not to miss the first show that evening.

HAD the theatre manager known in advance of Miss Mason's coming, he would have provided appropriate measures. As it was, the first he knew, Harley and she arrived in the company of Ali. Harley had called to tell Ali to meet him at the hotel; Miss Mason was tired after flying in from Hollywood.

The three, Ali, Harley and Sybil, sat in adjoining seats. And when Winko called for volunteers from the audience, Ali asked Sybil to volunteer. She smiled and stepped forward. The audience recognized her, and set up a howling clamor. She spoke a few words of greeting, while Harley beamed proudly.

"So you decided she doesn't eat like a pig, after all," Ali said.

"Well," Harley hedged. "We're not any of us perfect . . ."

"A jewel is made more rare by the defect," Ali said. "Watch."

Winko was going through the act of asking what she wanted most to be in her childhood.

"Oh," she said. "Once I wanted to be a sapphire, because I fell in love with the color. Another time I wanted to be the blue of the sea . . ."

"She's got him, now," Harley said in glee. "Let me see . . ."

"The third cycle," Ali said myster-

iously. "Rather unusual. Only in my land have they . . . Ah, well. We'll see."

Harley sat back and watched with evident enjoyment the hoped-for spectacle of Winko being stymied by Sybil's request. But Winko seemed not at all put out.

He gestured for the girl to step into the cabinet. She bowed and stepped forward. Winko closed the door on her, said the magic formula, and after a few seconds, opened the door again.

A large white spot moved its circle over so that it encompassed the cabinet. There seemed to be nothing in it. Then a gasp came from a thousand throats. Lying on a pillow of deepest black velvet, lay an immense ring, from which blazed the most brilliant blue color Harley had ever seen.

"And how do you feel, Miss Mason?" Winko asked.

There was no doubt of the voice which replied:

"Wonderful. If I'd known being a sapphire would be so thrilling, why, I guess if I ever have the chance to be one for good, I'll take it."

"Good! And now we must give you your second wish."

Once more the door was closed. And when it was opened again, even Harley shouted. For there, seeming to come from the very roof of the cabinet and disappearing again in the floor, fell the loveliest waterfall anyone had ever seen.

Oddly enough, Sybil's voice sounded a note of sadness:

"I—I'm sorry. I can't say how I feel."

When she stepped from the cabinet, she and Winko had to take so many bows, that finally she had to hold up her hand for silence and ask the audience to stop, there were others on the bill.

Dimly, Harley heard Ali say:
 "A creature from the third cycle.
 Hard to believe."

When Sybil returned to her seat, she took Harley's hand in hers and whispered:

"I don't know why but I feel as though I'd been purified in some strange way. I can't describe how I felt . . . It was wonderful and sad both. As if I wanted to remain that way, and yet I knew I had to return."

"Now, honey," Harley started to kid her. But she placed her fingers on his lips, stopping the words.

"I love you, Harley," she said. "I guess I've always loved you, even when you said I ate like a pig. The other night, I woke in the middle of a sound sleep. I thought I heard your voice calling me. I had to come. And, baby, I promise that you won't ever have to complain about my eating habits again—"

This time it was he who stopped the flow of words. Only he stopped it with a more effective way. With his lips pressed close against hers.

"NOW," Ali said to Gimme and Horace, "I want you to be careful with the cabinet. I showed you how to fold it. Winko will be back in a few moments and when he returns help him stow it in the car and drive the car to this address." He gave them a slip of paper with the name of his hotel printed on it.

Ali departed. No sooner was he out of sight, than Gimme was chortling:

"Now's our chance. Seems like fat-boy ain't gonna be with us. Good-bye cabinet. You and I, Squidgy, are taking it on the lam . . ."

Winko left them at the stage door, saying:

"All right, boys. After you bring the cabinet up to the room, drive the car

to the
 Ten
 aid, Gim
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"Now
 Gimme sa
 hunk of w
 Horace

asked. The paper through . . . shoved the other . . . within. He ran his fingers over the thin walls. Nothing. There wasn't the faintest sign of hidden catch. Gimme tapped at the walls, then grunted in exasperation. It was all too obvious that the walls were too thin to have any hidden spaces. He stepped out again and examined the thing from the outside. Still no clues.

"What you looking for, Gimme?"

"The gimmick," Gimme said. "They got to have a gimmick."

"Y'know what I think," Horace said, "I think it's the word that man says. That's what."

"Okay. Let's try it," Gimme said. "Get in."

Horace got in, the doors closed on him, and he heard Gimme pronounce the word. After a second, Gimme told him to come out. He stepped out and Gimme swore.

"What's wrong?" Horace asked.

"Nothing! Not a damned thing! Nothing except you look exactly like you did when you stepped in."

"But you didn't ask me what I wanted to be," Horace said.

"What's that got to do with it? You're still in there. It must be some gadget Winko carries with him."

"Try it, anyway," Horace begged.

"Okay. Now. What was it you wanted to be when you were a child?"

"An angel," Horace said in glee. "But not like the kind on Christmas cards. A real one, with a beard and

at."

ood old
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Winko did:

"ADASALAAM!"

He reached forward, and pulled the door open. A shriek came to his lips, but the words would not come out, his mouth seemed frozen, his body petrified.

A tall man in a snow-white robe stepped out of the cabinet. He was bald, clean-shaven except for a wisp of grey moustache. The old man's eyes were the bluest, most innocent Gimme had ever seen. And when the old man lifted a frail hand, Gimme felt as though it was a benediction over him.

"Thank you," the old man said. "The fifth cycle has need of me. There are those who await me. But what of you, friend, who have been my constant companion during my stay on earth?"

"You-you mean," Gimme asked through parched lips, "you're Squidgy?"

"The name you call me was only a temporary one. I am known by another. But come, friend. You would be lost without me. Come. C-o-m-e . . ."

There was only a patch of grey dust on the carpet to show that there had

been anything in the room, after Gimme closed the door.

"OH, YOU FOOL; You utter fool," Ali stormed. "Do you have their address?"

Winko produced the address with trembling fingers.

"Get a cab!"

Ali pounded up the stairs, the desk clerk in his wake, protesting:

"But if they've done something wrong, let me call the cops."

"There won't be any need to," Ali said. "I'll attend to them myself."

The two men stood and stared blankly at the empty room.

"Well," Ali said. "Where are they?"

"I don't know. But they gotta be here."

"Why?"

"They didn't leave. I know they didn't because they'd have had to come by the desk. An' there ain't no fire escape."

Then Ali saw it. He stepped forward, and stooping, ran his fingers across the dust. A look of awe came into his eyes.

Winko came rushing into the room.

"Well . . ." he stopped and saw the look in Ali's eyes.

"You mean . . . One of those two was Guatama?"

"Yes. We did not fail. He was here, as Adasalaam said. But which one? And where's the other?"

Gimme knew the answer. He had found the gimmick . . .

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READER'S PAGE

by THE READERS

WANTS CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

Sirs:

First off I want to mention the October issue of FA. I have just finished reading my copy, and I think the issue was wonderful.

To begin with, I always read and like the editorial. Then the letters are always good. They give a person a lot of technical knowledge.

"This Way To Heaven" by Harold M. Sherman was terrific! Sherman's conception broadened mine considerably. I could use a lot more stories like that one. The shorts were good, and especially, "The Framing Man" by Bob Williams. That was a splendid little yarn. I'll bet Bernie Kamins' story made a hit with a lot of fantasy lovers.

But here is the main point of my letter. I would like to cordially invite the readers of FA (and every other sf mag for that matter) to write me and form the "American Science-Fiction Correspondence Club. (A.S.F.C.C.) The cost will be nothing, all you have to do is write the members. The club's purpose will be the interchanging of ideas on, or concerning, science-fiction. This is also an invitation for you editors of FA to join!

Richard Abbott,
Rt. 1, Box 57,
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

O.A., Dick, consider us as having joined. And we'll do our part by letting the readers of FA know all the news of your club. We think this is a good idea, guys, so why not get behind Dick and start the ASPCC rolling.Ed.

BOY, IS SHE MAD!

Sirs:

Boy, am I mad! I have just finished reading the Reader's Page in the October issue of FA, and in particular, a letter by Paul Lowman, Jr.

I would like to point out a few things for the benefit of Mr. Lowman. First of all, according to his letter he has never missed an "Indecent" issue of FA. Otherwise he wouldn't be so critical. And in the second place, if the issues were so "Indecent" how could they hold his interest so well? ... These "sex" stories, as he calls them, must be darn good! And I'm certain that the great majority of the readers will agree with me.

As far as pulling down Shaver and Charles Myers is concerned, that nobody can do as long as I am able to defend those two authors. Shaver's stories and the "Teflec" series are my two favorites in FA.

Lowman says: "Admittedly, many yarns would seem dull without a few females." Boy, would I like to meet the guy face to face and explain to him just how important females are in his life!

HAD NEW ARTICLE



How Do you ~~KNOW~~ you can't WRITE?

Have you ever tried? Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery "I am a writer!"

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably never will write. Lawyers must be law clerks. Doctors must be nurses. Engineers must be technicians. We all know that, in our time, the gap does come before the chafon.

It is sad that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence in nothing else could.

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Many people who should be writing because overworked by laborious stories about men and women, authorized themselves (1) to borrow to the \$10, \$20 and \$30 or more, that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, sports, crime, folklore, sports, home-making, travel, fiction, travel, fiction, home and child activities, etc.—writing that not only is suited out to literary taste, and often on the impulse of the moment.

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And also show him in back issues of FA just what
a "daff" part we play in entertaining him.

I would like to mention all the fine stories in
the October FA, but I just can't get around to it
with this on my mind.

Irma Bernardi,
4541 N. Racine Ave.,
Chicago 40, Ill.

*We don't blame you for feeling warmly on the
subject, Irma. They just can't shake our gals
around life that!.....Ed.*

HE'S FOR AND AGAINST

Sim:

Although I have been reading FA and AS for a
long time, this is the first time I have sat down
to write to the Reader's Page. I was partly
prompted to do so by Harold Sherman's novel,
"This Way To Heaven." To be frank, I ap-
proached this story with a strong bias. I didn't
think it would be any good. I apologize. It was
superb! To tell the truth, FA gets a much higher
rating on my list from now on as a result of this
fine novel.

I liked "The Pruning Man" and "The Well-
Wisher," but didn't care too much for "Ernest's
Evil Entity." Oh, yes, the cover was swell.

Now for some remarks concerning what the
Reader's write. I think that FA must be definite-
ly classed as a fantasy mag. Just consider two
issues—the September and October numbers.
Neither contained anything that could be called
true science-fiction. It takes more than the mere
mention of atom bombs to make a story science-
fiction. Fantasy is a wide field of writing, but
science-fiction is narrowed down to a fine class,
with solid factual backgrounds.

As to comparisons between Shaver and Love-
craft, I frankly do not think that any is possible.
While, to give Shaver credit, I will say that his
writing has improved, he still cannot compare with
HPL. To name just one big difference, Lovecraft
was able to endow his writings with a pseudo-
reality. Shaver, no matter how hard he tries to
give reality to his writing, only seems to make it
more fantastic. And here I agree with Paul Low-
man, Jr., on one point. Much of Shaver's work
seems to dwell abnormally on the "icky" side.
His descriptions, while intended to convey evil, fail
to impress me greatly.

However, I can't agree with Lowman about the
covers and illustrations being indecent, nor about
leaving sex out of the stories. Aside from the
Shaver stories, I can't see, on the whole, that any
story has overdone it. As for the covers and
illustrations, well, maybe the female angle has
been overdone a little, but as for obscenity, I
cannot feel that that has been the case. It may,
however, be that friend Lowman and I mean dif-
ferent things by the term "obscene," in which case
there is no use in discussing it further.

Andre M. Weissenhofer,
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When he had given his reasons, they were sufficiently sound to intrigue some members of the party and nothing would do but that Sir William organize such a hunt. He did that, and because they were already in rhinoceros territory it proved a very simple matter to question natives about the location of the animals.

It so happened that a huge rhinoceros had been terrifying the natives in the vicinity probably in revenge for disturbing it and other animals around its native mudholes. The natives had been tracking the beast for a long time and welcomed Sir William and his friends' assistance. When Sir William got a description of the beast, he cautioned his friends that above all they must be careful because from what he could gather from the natives, this animal was larger than any rhino he had heard of.

According to the pictorial dimensions given him by the natives, who had fleetingly seen the animal, the rhino was a huge beast standing almost six feet at the shoulder and weighing perhaps three tons! Any rhino is tough—this one was almost impossibly so. In the first place, as Sir William pointed out to his friends, a rhino fears nothing. It can't see very well, but it has an extraordinarily keen sense of smell that will direct it to its target with radar-like efficiency. For short distances it travels at terrifically high speeds, and in spite of its bulk it has the agility of a gazelle when aroused. Nothing but a full-grown bull elephant can dare to stand up to it—and then the elephant has often been known to be beaten. The three foot men can rip open even an elephant!

The hunting party was prepared, briefed by Sir William and suitably equipped with heavy caliber rifles. In addition there were numerous carriers and gunboys, all natives who had had experience in hunting Africa's most dangerous animals.

One night, about dusk, with the "saring" not particularly good, the little hunting party came upon the spoor of the monstrous rhino easily detectable by the deep imprints it made in the earth. The natives became excited and whispered wildly. What made the situation extremely precarious was the fact that the visibility was poor, and the scene was set in dense under-brush country, a combination that could spell disaster.

THE party's first warning, first awareness of the animal, came when snorts and grunts were clearly heard from beyond a thicket to one side of a narrow trail. Instantly, as Sir William explained, everyone was alerted and ready. But before anyone knew what had happened, there was an earth-shaking thunder as a lumbering beast charged out of the thicket gaining speed and momentum with every step. It was the rhino! One shot was fired, before the thunderous monster caught a luckless hunter on the point of its horn and completely disemboweled him. It turned in its tracks and made for the next target. Three men fired at it as rapidly as they could. In spite

of that, the monster, armored hide, charged. Sir William said later it be killed in the next inst.

But as the rhino charged a native boy who was armed a broad bladed, short-hafted spear passed him, the carrier drove his left foreleg of the rhino. It hit soon toppled over dead not very tended victims. Miracle of miracle landed in just the right spot.

The hunters waited over that one. surrounded them was the fact that the most of whom were mortally afraid of the tended prey, could produce anyone with the age of the native boy who stood in the path of the charging beast and killed it with a simple spear when high-powered rifle fire did not even faze it!

When examined later, the rhino proved to be as huge as described by the carriers. It was found that it had been hit by eleven rifle bullets, none of which had penetrated a vital spot and most of which had not even gone through the two- and three-inch hide around the head of the animal.

When asked what he would regard as the most thrilling of all animal combats, Sir William replied that he would give his right arm to see a battle between a rhinoceros and a maddened bull elephant. He could imagine nothing more primitively exciting than that. As Locutus records, that very event had been seen in the Roman arena. In some ways, in spite of our civilized manner, it would be a wonderful sight today.

AS DUMB AS A FOX

★ BY JOHN LANE ★

"ALL right, Corporal, tell your story and make it clear." The captain glanced at Lieutenant Waterson significantly and then looked back at Corporal Fernon. The orderly room of the little Alaskan post became quiet and the half-dozen officers of the small garrison prepared to listen to Fernon's story. It was July seventeenth, nineteen forty-four, but to judges from the howling of the wind outside you wouldn't have known it.

"Well, sir," the corporal began, "I was huddling behind the log breastworks where the number three forty millimeter cannon is mounted. It was windier than hell, sir, and I was down as low as I could get. I looked at my watch and it was ten-thirty. In another half-hour I was supposed to go off duty and my mind was on a hot cup of coffee. Boy, that was—"

"Stick to the story, corporal," Lt. Waterson interjected.

"Yes sir. Anyhow, I was sort of drowsy, but I was awake. I knew that, sir, because I can

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shoved feet away. It
I opened the gun up
positive I hit 'em."
when the guard came,
d to the captain. "We
there wasn't a single foot-
was a tree that had been
billimeter shells."
," said the captain, "I'm not
ause of this. You fired the gun.
nervousness and maybe it was
I don't care. You've had a good
't spoil it, but don't let it happen

reposal, diminished, left the orderly room.
Date he gave the officers had a slight ges-
of defiance in it.

The incident described above actually occurred.
it was never recorded officially, but those men
who knew Fersen swore among themselves that
he must have seen something. The matter was
never pressed to a conclusion and like so many
unusual and almost mystic phenomena, it died a
natural death. The point is, by all the laws of
reason and logic, Fersen fired at something. It
was no accident for it left no tracks. Nor was it a
man for the same reason. The officers had a gay
time laughing at what they termed "Fersen's
pettingest." But the fact remains he saw some-
thing.

one
I could
ed to move
elled for the

did, corporal,"
touched the gun,

as, and as I yelled I ripped
even cover off, and I aimed at the thing
THE END

Christ. God, Man or Myth?

Did Christ himself write down any record of His life? If so, where are these writings today? Do they exist in any museum or library as sacred shrines? Can you find a trace of them in the vast and mysterious subterranean archives of the Vatican in Rome? The answer is NO! Nowhere has any man been able to discover a single word that Jesus wrote!

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